**~~More Recent Stories~~**

**Back in the Day Stories**

**a sequel to**

**Once upon a Time Stories**

**Brian Peacock**

**2020**

**Preface**

**This latest collection of reminiscences continue the theme of “Once upon a Time Stories”, published in 2018. The style is similar – mostly first person and with quite a bit of literary license. However, many of the stories are short - one or two pagers, with occasional longer pieces here and there. Currently I am reading “In our Time” - the American debut of Ernest Hemmingway, published in 1925. I note that he too started with short stories and vignettes. But, as I wish to avoid the services and costs of a publisher and the ISBN, and don’t expect to become rich and famous, I shall have only 50 copies printed, free of charge, available on request.**

**Contents**

1. **Ailments 2**
2. **Lost Truck 7**
3. **American Cricball 20**
4. **Back Yards 25**
5. **Ladies Bright Hour 29**
6. **Beaches 31**
7. **Biking 34**
8. **Boats 37**
9. **Bosses 40**
10. **Breakfast 44**
11. **Captains 47**
12. **Cars 50**
13. **Chairs 53**
14. **City of Fences 56**
15. **Conned 77**
16. **Cows 79**
17. **Cricket 82**
18. **Crowd Control 86**
19. **Doors 91**
20. **Eggs 94**
21. **English 97**
22. **Ergonomics 101**
23. **Fish 102**
24. **Fishing 108**
25. **Football 111**
26. **Gardening 114**
27. **Golf 117**
28. **IDK 120**
29. **Injuries 122**
30. **Jobs 128**
31. **Walkie Talkies 134**
32. **Running Buddies 137**
33. **Education 139**
34. **Jocks 142**
35. **Lakes 146**
36. **Limits 149**
37. **October 152**
38. **Passwords 154**
39. **Pets 156**
40. **Piano 159**
41. **Pie 162**
42. **Running 165**
43. **Snowballs 167**
44. **Sproatley 169**
45. **Teaching 172**
46. **Trip of a Lifetime 175**
47. **Trees 197**
48. **Visitors 200**
49. **Waiting 202**

**Chapter 1**

**Ailments**

We usually remember our illnesses and injuries although some exaggeration will usually occur over time regarding the lead up, the incident itself and the outcome, so here goes.

**Early days**

When I was five I caught the measles and had my hands and feet protected by cleaned cloth flour bags. I was pampered at home, but I was not allowed to start Sproatley Endowed School for a month or so, and even then, as a precaution, I wore flour bags on my hands but eagerly recited my times tables with the rest of the class. My next recollection, about five years later, was when my mother was confined to bed with the shingles. I was sent off the live with my grandma in the nearby village of Skirlaugh. It was the year of the big snow – 1947. My dad had to walk to work in Hull – about 6 miles. I went snowballing with the butcher’s daughter and my grandad and hit the latter on the head and broke his glasses. I recall that he was not happy. An accident on my way fishing occurred when I was an early teenager. I fell of my bike on the way and dislocated my little finger. We returned home and my dad took me to the Hull Royal Infirmary to have the dislocation reduced and my arm put in plaster. I got a hole in my knee playing cricket on our garden path, which was maintained by dumping the burned out cinders from the coal fires that we used back in the day. A near miss occurred when I was working on a stack at harvest time for a nearby farmer. I sort of missed the sheaf as it was forked to me from the cart and fell backwards of the stack – about 12 or so feet. Luckily I landed on my feet and reclimbed the ladder where the stacker greeted me with “wher’ve you bin?” In the 1940’s, my dad and uncle Walter constructed a makeshift boxing ring under the damson tree in the orchard next to the pig sty. Somebody punched me on the nose, I don’t like boxing. We also played cricket up and down the orchard path. One day the ball was hit into the run outside the pig sty, so I demonstrated my agility by climbing over the corrugated iron fence and recovered the ball. Unfortunately, the pig came to investigate this trespass, so I hastily started to climb back over the fence, and slipped, back into the pig run! The advancing pig was enough of a threat to encourage me to get up and back over the fence post haste.

**Student days**

Moving forward about five or so years I was a student in Leeds General Infirmary where I caught the mumps, probably from the small children’s asthma class. This greatly affected my daily routine of riding my bike to work. Around that same time I had joined the Headingly Rugby Football Club and played for the A team and the Wanderers; the first team was full of Internationals at the time. We mixed up the teams on Tuesday and Thursday evenings to do fitness and skills training and get some match practice by playing touch rugby. Anyway, I caught the ball going full out, dummied an outside pass, pulled the ball in and cut inside, past the defender and smack bang into the goalpost. Ouch! I had a great big long vertical cut in my upper lip and a couple of loosish teeth. So off I went to the ER, where I spent a lot of my work time dealing with sprains and strains, broken limbs and heads in the nearby wards. I recall that I had my lip stitched and the kindly nurse suggested that I should have a tetanus shot. Now it should be noted that the ER folk were a very collegial lot, so they gathered round while I was instructed to drop my trousers for the needle. A few years later while playing rugby in Birmingham I made a blind side break and the opposing wing forward sat on me and I got a torn cartilage, which cramped my style for that season. The rehabilitation was a mile or so walk too and from the Birmingham Accident and Rehabilitation Hospital, now sadly demolished. I had a brief job as a school teacher between the Birmingham Accident Hospital and my return to university at Loughborough. The school was down Hope Street in Balsall Heath, a very run down part of the city with lots of immigrants. One day, as it was raining we couldn’t walk along the road to the local church hall which doubled as a gym, so I conducted the gym class in a classroom and set out to discuss the finer points of badminton. This big youth was not interested and insisted on disrupting the class by talking. A couple of warnings and the threat of a caning did not deter the youth, so I dutifully went to the headmaster, who was a wimp, and gave the youth two blows on each hand. “You only caned me because I’m colored”, he said. On reflection this incident probably hurt me more than the student!

**Later Times**

I got a sprained ankle while playing football for Bilton, a village near my home in Sproatley, which put me out of the game for a month or so. However the big ankle sprain came half way down the hill in Hopkinton at the start of the Boston marathon. I stepped aside to take a leak in the Woods that line the road and stepped on a rock. I still have a picture of that black and blue mess. However, I had to finish the race as my daughter, Ginny, was waiting at the finish. I think that one took more than four hours.

Perhaps my most painful injury was just a few years ago. Cholecystitis! That is an infected gall bladder. But it was nothing that a sharp knife and a bunch of stitches couldn’t put right. General anesthetics really do work, I didn’t feel a thing. I wouldn’t wish that one on anybody. Also as I grew older I had my share of flu bouts and because of my travels more than my fair share of immunizations. Only yesterday I had Hepatitis A booster, Tetanus and Typhoid jabs; I did not get Yellow fever or Malaria. This experience reminded me of the many jabs we had in the Royal Air Force in preparation for our sojourn in Hong Kong back in the 1950’s. They stuck us in a line and made us run the gauntlet of eager needle sadists – jab, jab, jabbity jab; ouch!

**Nowadays**

I am in my eighties and I have contracted Dupuytren’s Contracture, which is a shortening of the finger flexor tendons, starting with my little finger and working its way across. Both hands. My little fingers just curled right up. I had an operation on my right hand so I can now shake hands; that is when the Coronavirus pandemic is not around to be caught.

I guess you would say that I got off lightly over the years.

**Chapter 2**

**Dad, I’ve lost the truck**

Mother and I were asleep; after all it was about twelve thirty on Monday morning. The front door creaked and then banged, gently. Just another job, but at least it informed the parents of the arrival of that boy. Something was funny though – the ever-open parental ear had not heard the sound of the truck’s engine nor the tires on the gravel driveway. Perhaps that boy had learned to switch off the engine and coast down the lane and then park out by the pond; after all it was twelve thirty and that boy was only 16! Ten o’clock was his time. The stairs creaked – another job. Gentle footsteps crept down the corridor.

“Dad, are you awake?”

“Huh”

“Dad, I’ve lost the truck.”

“Huh.”

“Mum, are you awake?”

“Of course I am; where have you been?”

“Mum, I’ve lost the truck”

“Where?’

“In the gravel pit”

“Which gravel pit?”

“Where have you been?”

“Chillin’.”

“Where have you been chillin’?”

“With Jeff and Joe and Matt”

“Why are you so late?”

“I was giving you some personal time.”

“Personal time is on Saturdays, not on school nights.”

“Sorry.”

“What’s this about the truck?”

“I’ve lost it.”

“Why?”

“I can’t get it out.”

“Where is it?”

“I told you, it’s in the gravel pit.”

“Why?”

“It got stuck.”

“Where?”

‘In the gravel pit.”

“Which gravel pit?”

“The one at the far end of Valley Road”

“So what do you want me to do?”

“Help me.”

“Where exactly is it in the gravel pit?”

“About a mile in down the hill?”

“Is it dark?”

“Yea.”

“How did you get home?”

“We walked.”

“But that is about five miles.”

“That’s why we’re late.”

“Is the truck all right?”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know; it was dark.”

“How stuck is it?”

“It’s stuck, we tried to push it and lift it but its stuck in a gully.”

“Why is it in a gully?”

“Because we drove into the gully.”

“Why did you drive into the gully?”

“Because we thought we could get through.”

“Why did you go to the gravel pit?”

“Because you bought me a four-wheel drive and we were trying it out.”

“The four wheel drive was so that you could get to school in the winter.”

“Did you lock up the truck?”

“Yea.”

“Can anybody see it from the road?”

“No, it’s about a mile down the hill and up the gully.”

“Go to bed, we’ll go and have a look in the morning.”

“’Night dad, ‘night mum, I’m sorry.”

“’Night.”

“’Night.”

“’Morning.”

“Huh.”

“Get up.”

“What time is it?”

“Six o’clock.”

“I’m tired, I got to bed late.”

“I know, you woke me up, remember?”

“Oh yeah, I lost the truck, didn’t I?”

“Come on, it’s getting light, I have to go to work today and you have to go to school.”

“OK.”

“Let’s go.”

“It’s raining.”

“So.”

“We’ll get wet.”

“So.”

“OK. I’m coming.”

“Put your old coat on and some boots.”

“I’m hungry.”

“Well grab an apple then, like me, and don’t forget the camera. We’ll need to record this one for posterity.”

“OK.”

Now the conversation on the five-mile trip to the gravel pit was very enlightening. That boy, Tom, explained that he, Matt, Jeff and Joe decided to go ‘off-roading.’ The board by the gate said “No Trespassing,” but Tom said that everyone went down there.

“Why does everyone go down there?”

“Because.”

“Because what?”

“Because that’s where teenagers go.”

“Why do teenagers go down there?”

“Because.”

“Because why?”

“Because, weren’t you ever a teenager?”

“No.”

“It figures.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“What does no trespassing mean?”

“It means don’t go on Saturdays, because the cops are around then. Fridays are usually OK though and they never come on Sundays.”

“Did anyone ever get caught?”

“Yeah.”

“Who.”

“Jane”

“Who?”

“You know, Jane, my sister, your daughter.”

“When?”

“A couple of years ago, when she was seventeen.”

“How do you know?”

“Joe told me, Jane used to go out with his brother.”

“What happened?”

“The cop let her go with a warning.”

At this poignant moment Tom and I arrived at the entrance to the gravel pits.

“OK, where is the truck?”

“Down there.”

“Where?”

“You can’t see it from here.”

“How do you get down there?”

“You drive down the track for about half a mile and then turn down the narrow path towards the gully.”

“We’ll have to walk, I can’t take this Cadillac down there, it’ll get stuck.”

“It’s raining, we’ll get wet.’

“So.”

“OK.”

“Come on. I’ll have it out in no time.”

“No chance dad, we tried for two hours.

“Just watch me.”

I parked the Cadillac, and we set off down the path. There was not much conversation, except when we woke a group of about seven deer.

“Wow look at them run”

“It’s a pity its not hunting season.”
”There’s no hunting around here.”

“Everybody goes hunting down here.”

“How do you know?”

“Joe’s brother told me.”

“How does he know?”

“He shot a seven pointer, with a bow, last year.”

“How did he get it out?”

“He has a four wheel drive truck, like mine.”

“It figures.”

“Teenagers don’t go down here in hunting season.”

“Why not?”

“It’s too cold and anyway they might get shot.”

By this time Tom and I were wet, our boots were muddy and we still could not see the truck. There were a lot of empty beer cans thrown around and remnants of old bonfires surrounded by logs.

“This looks like a popular place.”

“Huh.”

“Have you been here often?”

“No, honest, I have only just started to drive you know.”

“It looks like you have just stopped driving.”

“Why.”

“You lost the truck, remember?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“Are we nearly there?”

“Just round this next corner, then we turn right towards the gully, I think.”

“You think?”

“It was dark. It took us about two hours to get out, we must have gone the wrong way.”

“I think that Bill Cosby was right.”

“What?”

“He said that all teenagers are brain dead.”

“Why?”

“Never mind.”

“Huh.”

“I’ll be late for work, but that’s OK, I’m only meeting with the president, he’ll understand.”

“That’s good, maybe I’ll miss school.”

“Not if I can help it you won’t.”

“I think that this is the path.”

“Are you sure?”

“No.”

“Did you remember seeing anything like a tree near the turn off?”

“There was a plastic bag, but it might have blown away.”

“Try harder.”

“There’s the plastic bag, I told you.”

“Great! How far now?”

“I don’t know, about a quarter of a mile, I’m wet.”

The path began to narrow but there were clear wheel markings in the grass. Every now and then there was a mud pool and signs of wheel spinning.

“Why did you come along here? Wasn’t it obvious that you might get stuck?”

“No, the four wheel drive was great, you just have to put your foot down.”

“Remind me to teach you how to drive someday.”

“I know how to drive, I passed my test, didn’t I.”

“I guess.”

“It’s just over there, behind those bushes.”

Now was the moment of truth. The mud-splattered truck was pointing up a narrow gully with only its left front wheel and right rear wheel touching the ground. The left front wheel was at an unusual angle. The bed looked as though it was twisted and there was a big dent on the tailgate.

“How did that happen?”

“We tried to put a stone in to weigh down the back end and we accidentally dropped it.”

“There was no way that you could have driven up that gully, just look.”

“ It looked as if we could have got through last night.”

“Had you been drinking?”

“No honest, if you want to play sports in school you don’t drink.”

“But you are only sixteen.”

“I know. I don’t drink.”

“Get the camera, we need to show this one to your mother, she’ll never believe that her little angel could have done a thing like this.”

“OK dad, are you going to try to drive it out, I don’t think that you can do it.”

“I’ll try to reverse out.”

“That won’t work, we tried.”

“ I know how to drive.”

“So do I.”

I got into the truck, started it up, shuttled backwards and forwards between reverse and forward and nothing happened, except a lot of noise and a lot of flying mud.”

“I told you so.”

“Thank you.”

“We’ll have to get a tow truck.”

“For once you’re right. Let’s go. I’ve got a cell phone in the car. I should have brought it down here with me.”

“I know.”

Tom and I trudged up the hill, happy with this opportunity for father and son bonding.

“First I’ll call the tow truck, then I’ll call your school and say that you will be in at lunchtime and then I’ll call the president of that truck manufacturer and tell him that those off-road adverts are fake, trucks don’t have wings.”

“Good job, dad.”

“Hello, is that Main Street Towing?”

“Yup.”

“Can you come to the gravel pits at the end of Valley Road, my son’s truck is stuck way down in the bottom, half way up a gully.”

“No problem. I do this run at least once a month, more like once a week in the summer.”

“It’s raining.”

“So. I’ll be there in half and hour. I’ll bring the big tow-truck.”

“Well, at least I can catch up with my voice mails.”

“What shall I do dad?”

“Get a job and start saving up for the cost of towing and the repairs.”

Just the state trooper arrived, lights flashing.

“Good morning, sir. Can I help you?”

“No thank you, we are just waiting for the tow-truck.”

“But your engine’s running and you are parked at the side of the road.”

“It’s not my car, it’s my son’s, it’s just down there a little way.”

“Good job I didn’t catch him, I’ll have to start looking around here on Sundays as well as Saturdays, have a nice day.”

“Thank you officer.”

The tow truck arrived, lights flashing.

“Good morning sir, I’m Bill, where’s the truck?”

“Good morning, I’m Tom and this is my wife’s son Tom, he used to be my son but I’ve decided to give up being a parent. The truck’s about half a mile down this track, then along a narrow trail for about a quarter of a mile and then half way up a gully.”

“Oh, there, jump in, we’ll go the short way.”

“Which way’s that?”

“Instead of going down the track, we cut across the scrub, around that little hill and to the top of the gully, I’ll get close enough to put a rope on the truck and use the winch. I’ve been to that gully five times this year. Nobody can drive up the gully, although these brain dead teenagers think they can.”

“It sounds like you learned your parenting from the Cosby show too.”

“Yup. I’ve got three kids, but at least they know how to drive. The only trouble that they ever get into is with the girls. Wait a couple of years and yours will start to spread his wings.”

“Thanks for the advice.”

“Hey, your boy did good. He got further up the gully than any of the others this year. There’s hope for him yet.”

“Dad, I’m sorry.”

“Bill, would you like an apprentice?”

“Sure, I train at least three a year. Mending flat tires and working in the pit under cars is very educational.”

“How much do you pay?”

“Five bucks an hour.”

“How much will this towing job cost?’

“A hundred and twenty bucks for the towing, and it looks like six hundred for the body work. I’ll have to have a good look underneath to see what other damage he has done.”

“That means about two years at ten hours a week to pay for this one, Tom.”

“ But what about my home work dad?”

“You’ll have plenty of time for homework, it’s your social life that will suffer.”

“Dad, weren’t you ever a teenager?”

“No, I already told you, I went straight from high school to engineering school without noticing anything else but calculus. Rock and roll was for the rowdies.”

“Wow dad, you really were a geek.”

“Just kidding son, the difference between me and you is that I didn’t get caught.”

Bill put the hook on the truck, wedged his tow truck and started the winch. The pickup groaned, slid, bounced, groaned again and then rolled gently up the gully.

“I’ll tow this to the road and on to the shop if you wish. I don’t think that it is going to go very far on its own. How are you going to pay check or charge?”

“Charge, A hundred and twenty dollars wasn’t it?”

“Yup.”

“ I’ll call you this afternoon when you have had a chance to check it out.”

“Now, Tom, we need to go home and get a shower. You will be in time for fifth hour and I will be three hours late for my meeting with the president. I’m sure that he will understand. He isn’t very busy on Mondays.”

“Hey dad, how much do president’s earn a year?”

“A few million.”

“Maybe I’ll be a president then, but I’d rather be a rock star they earn a lot more.”

“Son, please have this discussion with you mother, I’m sure she’ll understand.”

**Chapter 3**

**American Cricball**

**Asian Batball**

**or whatever**

**The ultimate combination of familiar ball games for children and/or adults of all ages**

1. Levels: Basic, Intermediate, Advanced
2. Competitors: Family, Friends, Neighborhood, National, International, Inter galactic.
3. Sides: Two or more
4. Rules (Guidelines): minimal, agreed before start of game or negotiated throughout
5. Umpires and / or referees may or may not be useful
6. Scorers should be certified accountants or statisticians
7. Spectators should cheer but not jeer
8. Venue: Indoor, outdoor, field, beach, school yard or table top / carpet simulation with coins or marbles
9. The arrangement:
	* Area requirements 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 meters outdoors
	* Circle, square, rectangle, triangle, rhombus, hexagon etc. to locate bases
10. Equipment – minimal
	* + bat - any available size and shape: stick, umbrella, cricket, tennis, hockey, table tennis, baseball, golf club, hand or foot
		+ ball – soft e.g. tennis ball
		+ bases: discarded clothing, shoes, hats, jackets, pots or pansetc.
11. Playing area
	* wicket / batter circle – one meter
	* bowling (pitching) circle / shape 5 - 10 meters, approx.
	* bases – 3 to 5 - anywhere on or outside bowling circle
	* bowler (pitcher) location – anywhere on or outside bowling circle
12. Guidelines
	* Players – 2 or more, individual competition or as a team game
	* Wicket / strike
		+ target - legs below the knees or any object, such as a bucket or backpack
		+ or a “strike “ similar to baseball – a missed swing at a pitch between the knee and waist
	* 3 wickets / strikes and you’re out
	* Caught – fielder catches fly ball
	* Tag out (by fielder with ball)
		+ while running between bases
		+ tagging the base towards which the batter is running
		+ runner can change direction and hit bases in any sequence
13. Bowling (Pitching) Rules
	* ball can be thrown under or overhand by any fielder on or outside the bowling / pitching circle
	* may hit the floor, should use spin
	* “no ball”/”ball” – a pitch outside the strike zone (negotiable)
	* up to 5 balls (including strikes) followed by a walk to a base
	* fielders may / should pass the ball among themselves in order to become the “pitcher”
	* pitcher / bowler should identify himself / herself by shouting “play”
14. Runs scored by
	* Hit – the batter should run to one or more of the bases after he / she hits the ball
	* hitting ball out of circle / shape without bouncing
	* running to a base on the circle or other shape
	* one run for each base reached (max 3 or 5 bases)
	* fielder dropping a catchable ball (negotiation may be needed)
15. Length of game / innings – 3 outs, game may continue until players choose to finish
16. Competition - Individual (players take turns batting and count / shout their own runs) or team
17. Scoring - Runs or runs divided by wickets (round down or up?)
18. Any variation on this theme may be discussed / negotiated

**Alternative table top format** - Create players, balls, bases and wickets with coins or marbles; same flexible rules as above

Above all, have fun!

**Chapter 4**

**Backyards**

Yesterday morning I came across a few potatoes in a plastic bag in the pantry. We had had them for a while and they were beginning to sprout. So I took them outside and planted them in a row in a pretty messy part of our backyard on Amelia Island, next to a couple of old beehives. Our house is mostly shaded by live oaks which present us with lots of leaves to sweep, but we leave the leaves to their own business in the backyard; the live oaks are also home to lots of lichen and Spanish moss which drapes itself all over the branches. Come back in the Summer and see if this leafy soil and shade are conducive to potato growing.

I grew up in Mill House, Park Road, Sproatley. This house is the original home of the Rank family of flour milling and movie making fame. I think that the house was built in 1897. Behind the house there was a small garden with a lilac tree strategically placed next to the earth toilet which had to be emptied into holes in the ground in our vegetable garden. During the war my dad and Uncle Walter constructed an air raid shelter out of an old gasoline tank which was half buried and covered with dirt. It was very cozy and kept us safe when the sirens wailed and the bombs dropped in the fields around us. There was a large garden at the back with a path running through it, surrounded by fine hawthorn hedges, which I had to cut and shape every summer. In the garden we grew strawberries, raspberries rhubarb, sprouts, cabbages, cauliflower, peas, potatoes, beans, beetroot, onions, parsnips and a few other things. There was a mushroom patch in one corner. Next to the backyard there was a well and at the end of the path, near the garden gate there was another well with a pump. A second path branched off to the left and led to the orchard which had two sheds, one for our family to keep chickens and the other for Uncle Walter to tinker with his motorbike. In the orchard there were various apple trees and a damson tree. A pear tree grew up the side of the house. At the bottom of the orchard was Mr. Taylor’s cow sheds where he kept his cows. Sadly the garden has now been sold and a house stands where I used to play cricket along the back garden path.

Our back yard in Michigan covers 12 acres; it used to be 15 but we sold a little lot to someone who wished to build along the unique Hunters Creek Lane; so far they have not broken ground. The inner circle of our yard is given over to grass; perhaps “lawn” would be a nicer word, but the purists might object, and rose beds, rockeries, ponds and beehives. Among other things I grew were sprouts and potatoes in the vegetable beds. We dug three big ponds but they leak so we have three hollows which grow trees. The trees are cottonwoods which make a mess in the summer and strangle our air conditioner. I bought a tractor to cut the grass and make paths through the woods, which lead to the nearby golf course – a fine running route if you get there before the golf pro. A seasonal creek runs through the woods. We also bought a house for Lily in Atlanta with woods at the back leading down to a creek. The new child proof deck provides a safe and peaceful place to ponder the opportunities in the small area before the trees start and cutting a path down to the stream. We have a condo in Decatur with no backyard or river running through it.

We lived in Oklahoma before Michigan, in a fine ‘one story’, or bungalow as we used to call them, down Whispering Pines, just about a mile, past the football stadium, to my office at OU; I could walk home for lunch to see Eileen and the little chickadees. Wrapped around the house is a garden, mostly grass which takes half an hour to cut and edge. Running behind the back yard is a small seasonal stream. There was a treehouse in the corner of the backyard which, much to Lily’s discomfort, sprouted a wasps nest. Before Oklahoma there was cold and wet Nova Scotia. We had a fine house in the South end, just about half a mile from work. Our backyard was much of a muchness, whatever that means, with a fence separating us from a lawyer with twins. Our front yard had to be kept up to neighborhood standards. The next door neighbor was “Missy” Yu, a Korean doctor who stayed at home to bring up her two boys while her husband was head of surgery at the local hospital. Missy Yu was a wonderful friend for Eileen and auntie for our four little ones. But the weather and four children caused cabin sickness, so we escaped to the heat in Oklahoma. Before Nova Scotia was Hong Kong, which didn’t have backyards, unless you lived on the peak.

Our first home, after our graduation and wedding, was at 28 Wellman Croft, in Selly Oak, a suburb of Birmingham in Warwickshire, England. It is a corner house with quite a lot of grass to cut around the front and sides. I built a greenhouse in the small, fenced back yard and a bluestone patio and rose beds and a vegetable garden for sprouts and potatoes. I grew grapes and tomatoes in the green house. Our moves around the world have sprouted lots of sprouts and potatoes, and friends, sometimes over the back yard fence and, as now, across the end of our cul de sac in Wood Duck Road.

**Chapter 5**

**The Ladies Bright Hour**

At four o'clock one Wednesday afternoon in the early 1950s a gaggle of middle aged and elderly ladies alighted from the bus in the middle of our village, Sproatley. They walked briskly down Park Road to our front door, which was reserved for special people like the East Park Baptist Church Ladies Bright Hour. Once a month their rotation brought them to my mother's house for afternoon tea, which consisted of tea, with or without milk and sugar, cucumber sandwiches and scones with butter and strawberry jam. Their conversations ranged from upcoming weddings and children to the shortcomings of the minister, choirmaster and organist; when all else failed they reverted to the weather. Sometimes, after the tea, the Bright Hour ladies would sing a hymn around the piano in our front room or go for a walk down Park Road to watch the rooks return from their daily foraging. Happy times for this congregation.

An hour and a half later, at about 5.30, I trudged down the lane bloody and still bleeding, still in my football togs. I had tried to head a low cross, but instead connected with Murphy's boot. (I think I have told this part of the story elsewhere). Wednesday afternoon football was the highlight of the week, the school first team played against the second team, who usually had the help of a couple of teachers, but without a referee. We played the game for the exercise and thrill of winning, but, on reflection, it was mostly for the company, the importance of belonging. The half hour bus ride home was punctuated by considerable clucking by the conductor and other passengers. Not, "poor little boy, did he get his face kicked in?" but rather "don't bleed on me or the seat please." You can imagine the fuss, clucking and advice from the East Park Baptist Church Ladies Bright Hour when I came in through the back door.

Some years later as a college student, my interests still centered around the sports teams but now the collegiality extended beyond the pitch to the bar. It was always important to replay the game with the help of a couple of beers. The objective post mortem inevitably trended towards a resounding victory, despite the score. Groupthink, especially when lubricated, can be particularly biased. in fact I think that consensus is just another word for biased groupthink. Biased by the loudest voice, groups give way to teams when they have a common purpose, and teams give way to gangs, which grow into armies. The East Park Baptist Church Ladies Bright Hour was a formidable group, Napoleon would have shuddered.

When I was quite young, about seven or eight, we formed a gang whose main purpose and obsession was managing gang membership and leadership. No democracy here, might is right. Unfortunately or, on reflection, fortunately the village was small so there weren't enough six to twelve year olds to form two gangs so our gang had no more than 5 or 6 members on a good day. We focssed our attention on exploration of the hinterland, which meant the fields and farms and woods surrounding the village. We got our altitude training by climbing the horse chestnut tree on the village green. We were ready for Everest, but Hilary and Tensing, beat us to it, they were a team. Village boys gang activity was mainly limited to Saturdays and Holidays and always came second in the importance race to family and school activities, and Sunday School at the East Park Baptist Church where we were spied upon by members of the East Park Baptist Church Ladies Bright Hour who reported wayward behavior to our parents. After Sunday School a gang of us would walk and talk around East Park planning our visit to the Astoria Cinema next Friday night, again under the watchful eyes of the EPBLBH.

Groups and teams are strange entities; they have powers over the individual. Teams work together for the common good. Groups are just groups, linked in space and time serendipitously. Groups of cars and trucks believe that might is right and swarm along in impenetrable pack. Teams of cyclists ride around cities to take back the roads. Perhaps groups of pedestrians should walk around the sidewalks to take them back from the cyclists. In Dhaka they are all mixed up and move in random directions, shunning ordered group behavior. Groups of frenzied football supporters coalesce to encourage their favorite team. Dragon boat captains exhort their crews to pull, pull, pull. Runners pull their buddies through the last five miles. The East Park Baptist Ladies Bright Hour sing as one.

**Chapter 6**

**Beaches**

When I was a little boy, I lived in East Yorkshire. We visited beaches at Withernsea, Aldbrough, Hornsea, Bridlington, Scarborough and across the Humber at Cleethorpes. Sometimes these visits were on bikes, sometimes on public transport and once a year on a chartered bus for the Sunday School outing. These beaches sported cliffs, promenades, shops for spending your saved up pocket money and various kinds of accommodation, from campgrounds and caravan sites, through small single home businesses to grand hotels, and all sizes in between. Back in those days I recall that there was not much trash on the beaches, people took their wrappers home. The required equipment was a bucket and spade to build small or large sandcastles soon to be washed away by the next high tide. We played cricket, volleyball and a tennis like game on the beach and always ran races, both on the beach and in the shallow water. Nowadays, sadly, many of these East Yorkshire cliffs are being eroded, moving the rows of holiday bungalows to retreat inland every few years.

Moving forward some seventy odd years, I now live just a short walk to a very long beach on Amelia Island. I say long because my morning run, North or South, always requires a turn around at some convenient landmark. Unless that is, I make it all the way around the Southern tip and back along the A1A footpath. The Atlantic ocean is somewhat tidal; in fact, at low tide the sea may retreat a hundred yards. At high tide one has to dodge among the dunes or get one’s feet wet. We are clearly warned about rip tides and I personally, being a moderate swimmer, take the warning seriously, but my neighbor’s daughter, when she visits, splashes out to the deep water and swims for a mile or so parallel to the beach. The neat thing about this pretty clean beach is that there is hardly a soul to be seen. If I go out for my run at six, I run alone; by seven I say “good morning” to a handful of runners, and on a good day at nine I may see a couple of dozen beach walkers. Beach running can be informative if you study the footprints and stride lengths of other runners. Some point at ten to two and are short, others point straight ahead and are long. Nowadays, mine still point straight ahead, but are sometimes only half the length of my fellow beach runners.

In between these early days and nowadays, I have explored many exotic beaches. I have been to Bondi beach in Australia and beautiful beaches up either side of Malaysia. When the children were small we went to Hawaii to watch the surfers and build sandcastles. I have seen the Indian ocean from South Africa and the British Channel from Folkstone and Brighton. Hong Kong has a handful of often crowded beaches, such as Big Wave Bay and Repulse Bay. When I was in the Airforce, we even had a small private beach at Little Sai Wan which looked over the South China Sea to Kowloon and the New Territories.

These are just a few beaches that I have had the opportunity to enjoy. As you will know there are many beaches all round the world that vie for status among the Americans (North and South), the Europeans, Asians and Australians; perhaps the most beach proud nation are the New Zealanders. I don’t know much about the Japanese, Chinese and Russians, but I suspect they too are beach lovers. Ask them.

**Chapter 7**

**Biking**

When I was about twelve years old, I inherited my big brother’s dropped handle racing bike – a sky blue speedster. It was my pride and joy; I cleaned and oiled it weekly. It had, much to my father’s disgust, derailleur gears; he was a precision engineer whose company, Sizers, built corn milling equipment, although, during the war, they changed to building military equipment. My dad only approved of hub gears where the connections were parallel, compared with the slightly oblique derailleur gears. These technicalities aside, this bike carried me to Aldborough to play football, Hull to go to school, the East Hull swimming baths, a dance hall in Hornsea and all the local farms around Sproatley for potato picking, harvesting and playing. From time to time I delivered telegrams from the Sproatley post office to houses and farms in the surrounding villages such as Flinton, Humbleton, Thirtleby and Burton Constable. Occasionally I substituted for my mother to deliver the mail around Flinton, Humbleton and all farms in between. The speedy bike also carried me to the nearby gravel pits to go fishing; once I fell off and dislocated my little finger – more on this incident elsewhere.

A few years later I was a Physiotherapy student in Leeds. I shared a basement apartment with another student – Jim Backhouse – I wonder what happened to him over the next sixty years. This apartment looked over, or rather under, Woodhouse Moor which we had to walk or ride across to go to classes, and to the Leeds General Infirmary to practice our trade. Following graduation, I moved to the Birmingham Accident Hospital to ply my trade. I shared a flat in Edgbaston with Trevor Crocker and used my bike to ride down past Five Ways to Broad Street. At this stage in my career I bought a motorbike – a Commodore – to travel between Birmingham and my home in Sproatley. I also rode it to work in the orthopedic wards that were filled with fractured femurs, hips, shoulders and elbows belonging to motor cycle riders.

My next jaunt, back to college in Loughborough also involved riding the motor bike until my girlfriend suggested that we would be better off with a car. So we bought a Mini, which broke down and cost us an arm and a leg to have repaired. We also had bikes which we chained together in the bike sheds when we graduated. I expect that they are still there.

I didn’t have a bike in Hong Kong or in Nova Scotia, but Oklahoma was pretty flat, apart from the hill out of Whispering Pines, so I used a bike for a pleasant ride to work and to Sunday morning football games.

After Oklahoma came Rochester, Michigan, adorned with hills – particularly Dutton Hill – the site of my morning runs. Here the bike served its purpose for shopping and recreational rides along Paint Creek Trail, built on the site of an old railroad track, which goes for miles. Houston or rather Nassau Bay found me a house on a lake, just over a mile from the Space Center. I could walk or ride or even drive to work.

I don’t recall having a bike in Singapore, but early this morning, in Amelia Island, Florida, I rode my bike for 15 miles over the South Bridge and along the trails and inlets. Tomorrow I will clean and oil the bike.

**Chapter 8**

**Boats**

In the 1950s, I had two opportunities to experience ponds and boats; the first was the East Park boating lake in Hull over which I trod (by use of an ornate bridge) every school day to Malet Lambert High School – the green and yeller! On occasion, after school or at weekends we would rent a rowing boat to check out the various islands and bird habitats. We would sometimes have races and splashing wars, much to the displeasure of the park ranger. It wasn’t a very big lake, I think that the whole way around was a little over a mile; those interested in confirming these details can take the #69 trolley bus from Paragon Station along Holderness Road and alight at the stop between the ends of East Park Avenue and Westminster Avenue then walk down to the Park. Alternatively one can take the # 40 bus along James Reckitt Avenue and get off outside Malley.

The second boating opportunity of my youth was on Burton Constable lake, which had a fine bridge across its middle much like the one across East Park Lake. Perhaps when I grow up I’ll be an engineer and build bridges across the oceans, but that would put boats out of business. Billy Fletcher, the game warden’s son, and I, used to take a punt out on the lake and fish for roach, perch and pike and sometimes tench. One day I recall catching two big pike; they fought hard but eventually we got them on the floor of the punt for the second round which was conducted with the rod rest rather than the rod. Pike have a lot of sharp teeth, be careful. They do taste nice. Another experience with a small lake was Nassau Lake in Nassau Bay near the NASA Johnson Space Center. I lived right on the lake so I bought a canoe which I paddled around the lake every day after my early morning run. I didn’t see many fish but there were a lot of birds. On one occasion, fortunately after I had sold the house it rained and rained and rained The lake overflowed and the water came up to the second floor of my old house.

In the mid 1970s Eileen and I with a couple of kiddywinks in tow, decided to go around the world as we had a few months long leave from my job at Hong Kong University. One leg of this trip was on a big boat – the QEII – from New York to Southampton. The food and entertainment were great, but we had to keep our little ones on leads, because, although they were learning to swim, they were not experienced with fending off the sharks that populate the Atlantic ocean. Another trip with these two chickadees was from Penang to Singapore on a smallish cargo boat. We sailed through a typhoon. Now that was an experience and a half. Luckily we arrived with our full complement of children.

While we were living in Hong Kong we thought we would explore the local beaches by sea. So we bought a 27 foot junk with an inboard / outboard motor; it was called Ramshackle. One day we were chugging merrily around Lamma Island with our friends David and Lerryn and their two little ones. Now to put this adventure in perspective, I should mention that David was a captain on supertankers that travelled from the Persian Gulf around the world, full of oil. Anyway when we were well out in the South China Sea, Lerryn pointed out that there was a lot of water in the bilges. On further inspection we noted that the boards at the back end (stern) of the junk had sprung outwards and we were taking in water very quickly. Being a resourceful and fully qualified small boat navigator and captain, I sized up the situation and solicited advice from the assembled company. Eileen and Lerryn secured the little ones. David put a child’s bucket to good use baling the bilges, while I went full throttle (about 5 knots) to Aberdeen harbor. We made it. A few weeks later Ramshackle sank in a typhoon and we got all our money back from the insurance.

Another South East Asia holiday took us to Malaysia, from Singapore to Kuantan and up to Penang, by car, not boat. The car broke down in the middle of nowhere. I think I prefer boats. Some years later Eileen and I took a boat trip up the Mekong River. The river started wide but soon we were close to the tropical forest on both sides. Swimming or even wading were not advised due to the alligators. But the scenery and food were magnificent. I highly recommend that trip

**Chapter 9**

**Bosses**

Rule number 1: The boss is always right.

Rule number 2: When the boss is wrong, refer to Rule number 1.

“Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them” (William Shakespeare).

Many years ago, 1986 to be precise, I was appointed as manager of product human factors in the CPC Division of General Motors; this move from academia (The University of Oklahoma) occurred through a professional contact at a conference who was moving up to a broader director’s job. So we bought a camper van and bundled together a bunch of children and all our worldly goods and drove up to Detroit, Michigan. And started house hunting.

I walked into my glass sided office next to my boss’s office on a Monday morning, looking sharp in my best suit and a tie. My boss (John Alfes) walked into my office and greeted me with a question. ‘Welcome to General Motors, Brian. Are you ambitious?” I replied, “Somewhat, but I am mostly interested in practicing what I have been preaching for the past few years.” John replied, “Do you go to church?” I said, “no, I did as a teenager and then drifted away, but my wife is a Catholic and we were married in a Catholic church.” “Well” said John, “You should start going to church again to fulfill your ambitions, because you’ll need 19 promotions to become President of General Motors an only 4 to become Pope.” “By the way, take off that tie and jacket, you look like one of those college professors.” John was a great boss.

After a year or so I was appointed as manager of my own car program – “The ACCESS Car”- a program to design a car for old folk, like what I am now. After a year or so of development this program bit the dust. I spoke with the big boss about this and he explained that “You can’t sell an old man an old man’s car”. Many of the couple of hundred features we developed on that program did find their way into other models, including a forerunner to the OnStar program. That boss was once pulled over in his Corvette for overtaking a police car that had its lights going in pursuit of another speeding car.

So I moved into manufacturing and set up the Corporate Manufacturing Ergonomics Laboratory with a bunch of very experienced manufacturing guys and a few new college graduates. It was a very collegial community for about ten years, until one day a guy from one of the divisions, who was connected to my boss’s boss, walked into my office and said’ “I’m going to have your job.” Now I had expected that my #2 and good friend, Ed Mohr, would get the job as he was very well qualified and experienced, and popular. Anyway when I retired shortly after, the upstart got the job. He only lasted a couple of months before he was replaced by Ed.

There is a very long hierarchy in the military, with commissioned and non – commissioned ranks. The best bosses are the drill sergeants, they march up and down the ranks of recruits and say – “sonny, am I hurting you”, “no sir”, don’t call me ‘sir’, I’m a sergeant, not an officer; am I hurting you?” “no sergeant”, “I should be because I’m standing on your hair, dismiss and go for a hair cut and then come back for a personal inspection.” “yes sergeant, sir”.

Even professors have bosses, some better than others. However, professors get to boss around many undergraduate and graduate students and hold the power of grades over their heads. The most enjoyable people to work with are the thesis and dissertation students. Some of these used to play on my football team and became famous generals and industrialists. Professor’s bosses are called Deans and Presidents with a few assistant, associate and executive descriptive titles to stretch the hierarchy. “Some (of these bosses) are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them.”

Cricket, rugby and soccer bosses are called captains and managers, owners and referees. The most important job of captains is to wander to the middle of the pitch before the game and toss a coin to determine whether they should have the kickoff or the wind at their backs during the first half. They occasionally have to argues with the referee politely and suggest that he sees an optician; they also get help to pick the team along with the manager. Managers are good at negotiating revolving doors when their team fails to progress up the league table and win promotion or the championship. Many managers used to be captains and are used to winning and losing; there’s always next week. Owners are the big bosses they get to hire and fire people and buy everybody dinner when the team wins the cup.

Children like the word “bossy” which they apply to other children that they don’t like – “bossy – boots”. Some children get to be made prefects or milk monitors in school. Milk monitors have the best job – they get to drink the left over one third pint bottles of milk. Prefects have to stand in the middle of corridors while the school children march up and down the corridors in single file between classes. The trick is to overtake while the prefect has his back turned, at the risk of being caught and being given 100 lines: “I must not overtake in the corridor.”

**Chapter 10**

**Breakfast**

Today we had four breakfasts – at home, then Lily’s, Caroline’s and Ginny’s. Although we had opened most of the Christmas presents last night at Lily’s, we decided to tour the children’s homes to help the grandchildren check out the remaining parcel’s under the respective trees. This evening we had a grand Christmas dinner at Ginny’s: turkey, cranberry sauce, string beans, peas, scalloped potatoes, Christmas pudding, trifle, eggnog and champagne. Last night at Lily’s was and elaborate starter, with ham, eggnog, shrimp, mulled wine, cheese and old fashioned.

Speaking of breakfasts. When we were first married, we lived at 28 Wellman Croft in Birmingham, England. Each morning we ate a piece of toast with marmalade while standing up in our kitchen. We were both in graduate school and walked down the hill in Selly Oak to the university. I had a lab looking at how time and interpolated content made people forget, I didn’t test old people like me who are good at forgetting. Eileen first wondered how many bathrooms people in Birmingham had and then got interested in how people got to the doctor. In their infinite wisdom, the university after four and six years considered that we deserved doctorates and gave us a ticket to ride. So we did, with two kiddywinks, one more on the way and one a little later, to Hong Kong, Australia, Canada, Oklahoma, Michigan, Houston, Prescott and Singapore. Our breakfast habits didn’t change much over the years although, of late, eggs have been in vogue.

Recently, when we occasionally visit our condo and family in Decatur Georgia, I have joined the ROMEOS (Retired Old Men Eating Out) at 8.15 am in the lobby where we walk to a local watering hole and tell used to be stories over omelets and bacon. But usually I eat cereal and Eileen has an egg. The breakfast cereal dudes have brainwashed a whole country with their tasty flake variations. When I was little, we only had Kellogg’s’ Corn Flakes, now there is a lot of competition for that morning market with various genres of corn mixed with nuts and berries all roasted together with a bit of sugar to keep the sweet teeth and dentist happy.

During military service and college we ate in large cafeteria; institutional food is great, no matter what the naysayers say. You have choices, hot, cold or somewhere in between, quite a lot of green, some red, yellow and whitish, not much blue, although occasionally purple. Tea or coffee? Orange or mixed juice. We sat eight to a table, reminiscent of college, where, in the evening, a senior sat at the head of each table to check on the table manners and conversations among the juniors. In the morning, discipline was less formal and the food passable.

Breakfast while camping was fun. You get this mixture of flour, water and fat, mix it into a soft paste and wrap it round the end of a stick. Then you thrust it into the camp fire, alternately turning and inspecting for an allover shade of light brown. You pull it out of the fire and carefully twist off the baked dough. Then you stuff the pocket with the sweetness of your choice, such as honey, syrup jam or simply butter and sugar and raisins. If you have a savory bent you can substitute fried tomatoes, onions, mushrooms, bacon or omelet for the filling. Delish!

**Chapter 11**

**Captains**

Captains are like bosses, they are leaders of boats, airplanes and sports teams. I have some experience of all these with a couple of, now retired, licenses and some memories of football, rugby, table tennis and cricket. Here we have three descriptors – captains, bosses and leaders, there may be more.

Starting with cricket; the captain’s job is to walk out onto the pitch before the game and ceremoniously press his thumb into the closely shaved pitch; he then puts his finger in the air to assess the wind. Prior to the toss the home team captain shows the coin to the visitors captain to validate its design and balance. Then he tosses the coin, high in the air, for the captain of the other side to call tails (tails never fails). If the coin lands on its edge it must be tossed again. The winner of the toss then goes through the rigmarole again of pressing the pitch with his thumb and raising his finger to check the wind. Then he announces, “We’ll bat” or “We’ll bowl”, based on his intricate knowledge of strategy, the relative strengths of the two teams and the state of the pitch. A newly rolled pitch after watering may make it “green”, whereas to much rain will make the pitch “sticky”. Too little rain / watering and too much sun will make it hard and this may turn to crumbly.

The cricket captain’s next job is to write out the batting order and risk offending a colleague with an inflated opinion of his personal prowess. His duties then are to say “good luck” or “bad luck” to his colleagues as they traipe on and off the field.

The captain of the fielding side is more involved. First he sticks his finger in the air to check the wind, then he checks the ball for whatever, then he tosses the ball to the lanky guy and points to one end of the pitch while the guy with the pads goes to the other end and crouches behind the wicket. Next the captain sends the other players to the different points on the compass and then finely adjusts their locations from afar, again with a wave of his finger. The bowler sends a quick one down the leg side and on to the boundary, so the captain tells the guy with the gloves to stand back a bit. After a while the captain gets tired of the lack of wickets and surplus of runs so he substitutes himself to stem the flow, usually with no more success than the first guy. So he resorts to spin and then the rot really sets in. After a few hours, depending on whether this is test cricket at Lords or village cricket on the green, the batting team exercises the mercy rule and declares so that the massacre will stop and the other team will have a go in the middle. The two teams change places and the game is won or lost and everybody retreats to the bar to analyze in great detail, over a pint or two, what went wrong or right and say “see you next year.”

In rugby the captain is often a half back who hides behind the scrum until he says something critical of his forwards and they subtly let the opposition through to sit on him. The real leader is the pack leader or the hooker; he is first to every loose scrum, has long hair tied back to reduce the friction, and shouts loudly at anyone in sight to charge. As a half back I really did not think much of the forwards finesse, I simply thought that their job was to give me the ball so we skillful ones could get on with the game. I did learn to behave more politely to my protectors after they gave me the hint. The job of the half back is to suggest where the winger throws the ball in a line out by positioning themselves closer or further from the side line. Again a subtle parting of the line could put the vocal half back on his back. So the forward’s view is “leave ball, get on wi’t game.”

In football, i.e. soccer, the captain doesn’t do much except toss the coin to choose the direction of play at the start. It is generally thought that, given the choice, you should play against the wind in the first half. Many of the strategic decisions are made before the game, like who should take a penalty. The captain may play the role of cheerleader – “Get stuck in lads, kick ‘owt above grass!!

His main job is to argue with the blind referee in subtle ways; just enough so he doesn’t get sent off.

**Chapter 12**

**Cars**

Our first car was a Morris Mini Minor, bought from my cousin; my mother provided the funds – about $500 in English money. After the first few hundred yards it broke down and cost more to put right than it had cost in the first place. As we couldn’t afford the repair cost, the dealership put it up for sale; I remember looking sadly through the dealership window. Then we got the next installment of our local authority grant and bailed it out. After a year or so we graduated to a convertible Morris Minor – this time with a 1000cc engine – probably the best car we ever owned. We drove it to Wales for our honeymoon, having been married by Father Basil on the morning before we attended our graduation ceremony.

I had a pretty good stipend as a graduate student and Eileen had a job for a while at CURS – a center for urban and regional studies – her task was to tabulate the number of bathrooms in inner city houses. Being flush, we bought an MGB – a hot, black convertible. Eileen had long hair in those days and reveled in her wind-blown look. She had also moved into graduate school with me – to study communications in the health service. But then we had two children so we bought a VW minivan – great for holidays and trips home from Birmingham to our parents in Hull and Fleetwood. Brian took over Eileen’s job, while she looked after two little ones and completed her dissertation.

Next we moved to Hong Kong and bought a Renault, which we had painted bright green. Perfect for wandering around Hong Kong, taking the kiddywinks to pre-school, for trips to the beaches and cricket matches on the Kowloon side. A short sabbatical in Australia was well served by a mid-size Hillman station wagon, which we drove from Melbourne to Adelaide and back. There were three rows of seats, great for three sleeping children.

Our move to Nova Scotia was complemented by the purchase of a full size Pontiac station wagon. It was a beauty. It did about 15 miles to the gallon on a good day, going down hill with a back wind. However a couple of years in the cold wet climate gave us itchy feet again. So we moved to the University of Oklahoma with four children and a campervan which we bought with a good turn in price for the Pontiac wagon. The camper was ideal for the long trip from Halifax to Norman with all our worldly belongings and children. It also came in useful when we arrived in Norman with no place to stay. We parked the camper out by Lake Thunderbird and I commuted back and forth in an used MGB. Soon Rachael Zelby, our realtor and wife of an Electrical Engineering colleague, sold us a house that we couldn’t afford down Whispering Pines, next door but one to the football coach – Barry Switzer. But we survived an bought a small import – a Mazda I believe. We had to sell it a few years later when I joined General Motors. We also sold the camper.

Car wise GM was something different. Senior folk in the company got to drive all sorts of competitors car through the Product Evaluation Program – we drove a new car for a few weeks, filled out and evaluation questionnaire then took out another car. I brought home some real fancy vehicles – such as Porsches, and Ferraris and examples of our partners’ products – Opels and Vauxhalls. I was able to take out corvettes and Cadillacs for special occasions, like prom night and Ginny’s wedding.

GM retirees could get good deals on GM products once every year or two. So we made good use of this program when I went off the NASA and later, the Prescott Arizona of Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. There I swapped my car for a Cessna and a Sukoi.

**Chapter 13**

**Chairs**

Chairs are things that get your eyes, hands and feet in a good location to do things, or sometimes they are just for sitting on. “Sometimes I sits and thinks and sometimes I just sits.” Function aside, chairs are often designed to look or feel good. Queen Anne chairs have bent legs and arm chairs have soft cushions. Back in the day before chairs were invented people just sat on a rock or tree stump. Often they just squatted.

Chair design, children’s chairs aside, are generally “one size fits all”, although sometimes there is a vertical adjustment mechanism using a screw and hydraulics. Enthusiastic chair designers even add back tilts, arm swivels and adjustable head rests. Barber’s and dentists have the most elaborate concoctions. Generally the width of a chair is a bit greater than the distance between your two ischial tuberosities, the depth should be shorter than the distance from your back and the back of your knee and the height lower than the distance between the back of your knee and the floor, perhaps allowing an inch or so for your shoe heel. If you are sitting at a bar, the dentists or the barbers, or you are a baby, your chair or stool may have long legs to bring you up to the height of a surface designed for standing people. The foregoing theory would be all right, if people were all the same size, but they aren’t and they want to do different things, so we are back to square one. So, given approximate positioning, people of different heights adapt by bending their back or legs or arms. Some unfortunate people, like those who make your shirt or smart phone, sit crouched all day over their work surface, with minimal if any use of the backrest. Not to worry, they also get less than minimal wage for sitting down all day.

Chairs for special purposes such as driving, piloting, merry go rounds or ski lifts have additional straps so you don’t fall out or move when the vehicle or sitter do strange things. Astronauts are really strapped in when they blast off, but jockey’s saddles rely on the stirrups or knees to keep them stable when they jump over hedges. Little children stand on chairs to reach the light switch. Chairs are useful in the bar fights you see in the movies although I have never seen one for real. Perhaps there should be Olympic competition in chair throwing or fighting. In academia or in business meetings the chair is the boss; ‘chair’ is sometimes expanded to “chairperson”, he or she sit at the end or middle of a table and sometimes even have bigger offices and chairs. Sometimes these chairs get angry, but I don’t think that they usually throw their chairs.

I got to design chairs a few years ago in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Mass Transit Railway had to have long benches town the sides of the carriage so that short riders could stand (that is people who took short rides, not short people who had a problem reaching the swept back grab rails). I did an anthropometric survey of potential passenger’s widths, but this precise science was trumped by old timers’ design standards – “sixteen inches to the bum, sixteen bums to the ton”. The seats were to be scalloped to identify a passenger’s sitting region – one size fits all. However, the fire department jumped in on the act. They decreed that we could not use aluminium, which can be deformed in two dimensions, rather we would have to use stainless steel, which can only be bent one way. So we had to get rid of the scallops and were left with a flat, shiny, bench seat, and instead of the intended six passengers to the bench we sometimes observed as many as nine skinny passengers wedging themselves in.

Perhaps the worst kind of chairs are those in lecture halls and examination rooms. They are designed to keep students awake during boring lectures and impossible exams. It is interesting to observe, from the front of the class room, the contortions adopted by students as you are spouting serious stuff.

As I write this nonsense, I am sitting on a couch with my feet on a table. A couch is a kind of big, soft chair and sometimes grows couch potatoes that are fertilized by the television with Monday night football or Saturday morning cartoons for small potatoes. I say to myself, “what a wonderful day, get off your chair and go for a run.”

**Chapter 14**

**City of Fences**

As a little boy, I visited Buckingham Palace in London, England. Not that I actually visited the Palace; rather I got to look at it through the railings. I was mostly impressed by the guards, wearing big busbies, standing like statues outside the closed gates, from time to time making a sharp right turn and marching up and down their beat. I suppose that they marched so that they would not get varicose veins. At that young age I did not question the fact that I was not allowed past the gates; the king lived there and he was important; I sang anthems about him; he was busy running a nation so why would he want to be bothered by the attentions of a little boy, however patriotic.

In 1939, my family moved out of Hull to a little village, called Sproatley, some 220 miles from London, or so it said on the signpost. Nowadays the motorways and the Humber Bridge have created new work for the signpost painters. We moved to a 200-year-old house built by Joseph Rank, the miller and ancestor of the famous movie magnate, J Arthur Rank. The house was called Mill House (look on the Internet, it still hasn’t changed). A great big millstone formed the floor of the porch outside the back door and the ruins of the old windmill stood at the bottom of our orchard. We had a large orchard and garden, which were surrounded by a high impenetrable hawthorn hedge, with one small gate at the end of the garden path, next to the well from which we pumped our daily supply of water. The thick prickly hedge kept out many invaders but, not, as in my favorite bedtime story book, neighbour’s cats, dogs and rabbits.

When I got home from London, I played the game of sentry outside the gate, every now and again marching along the path outside the hedge to the front door of the house and then back to the garden gate. I even wore a soldier’s helmet that was left over from the war. In school I learned that over the years my Island had had many invaders – the Romans, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Vikings, French – and that most of the original inhabitants had become Welsh and Scottish and Irish, pushed out because they did not build fences and because they had not enough sentries marching up and down the beaches and cliff tops. Sometime later in history my country took over the management of many other countries and created a large empire. More recently these countries obtained self-government sent many of their people to my country as immigrants to avoid oppressive regimes and to find work and security. All this movement could have been prevented by the building of walls or fences or hedges, but even then, like Peter Rabbit, people would have found a way around, over or under. When I was a little boy the enemies flew their bombers over our (de)fences. Nowadays the immigrants wade across the Rio Grande into America. Perhaps we should build a fence between the USA and Canada. Meanwhile an impudent builder built a house where our garden used to be. *C’est la vie*, as they say in Sproatley.

Before the war it was fashionable for city houses to have wrought iron fences. They were usually set in concrete on top of a small brick wall; the tops of the vertical members resembled large sharp arrowheads, thus making the four-foot high fence difficult to climb. A matching ornate gate opened with a latch to allow visitors through to the front door where they attracted the attention of the homeowner by giving the cast iron knocker a sharp rat-a-tat-tat. It was interesting that, because of the prevailing knocker technology, which required the amplification features of the house hallway, the knocker was placed on the door, not the gate. Just the other day, I called my daughter on my cell phone from the sidewalk to buzz me in to her New York apartment complex. The wrought iron fences were symbolic and ornamental – they did not stop people from getting in, or from depositing their used fish and chip newspaper wrappers into the small front gardens. During the war the fences were cut down and sent to factories to make war weapons to be used to knock down other people’s fences.

Over the years I have had the opportunity to work with many kinds of fence – both natural and man made. As a very young boy one of my first jobs was “tending cattle.” Each morning after milking, the farmer herded the cattle along the road, through the village and into a field that was surrounded by a very spotty hawthorn hedge. My job was to keep the cattle in the field and off the road until evening milking time. The cows spent the nights in a well fenced in paddock close to the farm. Now very young boys can be distracted from the central focus of this vigilance task, but in those days the traffic was not dense and so it was possible to recover from the odd lapse of attention. I remember collecting pieces of flint, which I am sure, were prehistoric arrowheads and knives. Yesterday I saw an exhibition of flints in the Hirschorn Museum, in Washington, DC, in America. As I grew older, I advanced to hedging and ditching on the farm. We were armed with four tools – a billhook, a sickle, a scythe and a spade. The sickle and scythe were used to cut the undergrowth from the banks of the drainage ditches that were next to every hedge. The billhooks were used to slash and shape the hawthorn hedge and lay thicker trunks across the gaps. Finally, the spades were used to dig out the ditches. I was able to use these skills for the annual cutting of the hedge around our garden and orchard – all 100 yards of them – between five and eight feet high and two to three feet thick. I added some manual shears for the delicate task of shaping the hedge, as there was much peer pressure in the village to maintain neat appearances.

Recently, I have owned between 4 and 7 houses because I don’t like the idea of my family members paying rent. I also believe that the capital gains of real estate will outstrip that of the stock market and I don’t understand the shape and sizes of Wall Street fences. My youngest daughter lives in a New York apartment with access through a modern day knocker system – you press a button outside the complex, my daughter asks “friend or foe” through the intercom and when I reply “friend” she pushes a button, which operates a relay and unlatches the outside door. We then repeat the rigmarole at the bottom of the stairs before finally getting to the door of the apartment and operating a wrought iron doorknocker. One day the lights outside the apartment complex were not working so I couldn’t read the worn out numbers on the panel. I pressed randomly and was greeted by a head out of a window telling me that I should not invade his privacy. Thank technology for cell phones. My second daughter lives in a mountain village in California. Her house is 100 years old and her large garden has a wire fence around it. I suppose that the fence is supposed to keep out deer and bear and neighbours and keep in her occasional dogs. Her garden is prolific with vegetables and fruit and chickens, which I suppose could attract deer and bears and neighbours. The fence is not ornate; perhaps it is symbolic. It has gaps and needs repair.

The family home sits on fifteen acres of fields and woods and ponds. It has no fences, not even symbolic fences. Sometimes, teenagers in cars park down the road and leave their beer cans and fast food containers on the property. Perhaps we should build a very high fence.

Currently, I live in Houston with a swimming pool in my back yard. I had to have a fence installed to keep neighbors’ cats and dogs and children from being drowned. The fence down one side is made of wire, which one can see through, but that on the other side is made of wooden boards and is much higher. I can talk to one set of neighbors over the wire fence but I need to go round to the front door and knock on the brass knocker to talk to the others. I am often invited in to the homes of both neighbours. One lot is Texan Republican and the other is Jewish Democrat. They have different views about the utility of fences. The Republican used to fly an F-4 jet – now that’s one mother of a fence – more effective in some ways than the guard marching up and down outside Buckingham Palace, but unlikely to prevent Peter Rabbit from squeezing under the gate. The lady of the Jewish family is a lawyer who is employed to create and knock down legal fences in order to further the interests of her big business clients. The husband is a musician and restaurateur. He does not like fences in his restaurant; money is the same color from whatever pocket, providing that pocket is also associated with a shirt and a pair of shoes and a somewhat sober owner. He would like to build a fence around his sixteen-year-old daughter, fat chance.

At the bottom of my garden there is a lake, which is just as good at drowning cats and dogs and children as my swimming pool. There is no fence around the lake and would be drowners can get to it easily; so much for the City ordinance that requires me to have a fence around my swimming pool.

Now my first daughter is a pediatrician, who spent her teen-age years earning money as a lifeguard. She has four small children who cannot swim, yet. She is also sensitive to the statistics on toddler drownings. I guess some fences may be useful; perhaps we should put a fence between our front yard and the road to prevent our toddlers from being knocked down by cars. But that is against the City ordinance; fences are unsightly. There are all sorts of birds on the lake at the bottom of my garden – pelicans, egrets, cranes, scooters, seagulls, swans, geese and ducks and many more of all shapes and sizes and colors. Every day the ducks like to leave the lake and walk up the lawn to my swimming pool, which they like to use as a lavatory. Naturally they would not wish to use the lake, because the fish and nutria might complain. The ducks take notice of my complaints especially when I charge waving my arms and shouting angrily: “Please do not use my swimming pool as a bathroom.” So I built a wire fence, three feet high, which I have to move and replace every time I cut the grass. This unsightly fence deters the casual visitors, but not the determined ones who know how to fly. I guess that I will have to succumb to fence inflation, just as the USA did when those unwelcome visitors did not use the front door at the World Trade Center.

A couple of years ago some guys commandeered some airplanes and, unannounced, flew them into the World Trade Center in New York and into the Pentagon. This was a very offensive act. It killed many innocent people, but many more die every day on in our country and abroad of other causes, including wars both foreign and civil. I call the gang wars on our city streets civil wars just like the ethnic cleansing efforts that pervade our world. I suppose the World Trade Center and Pentagon was chosen as targets because they did not have high enough fences. They were also great symbols, but, just like the wrought iron fences in the town houses and my garden hedge, they did not keep out the wiliest of intruders.

Today, I am sitting in the Capitol Holiday Inn in Washington DC, in the United States of America. My entry was assured at the desk by the presentation of a credit card and a photo ID, followed by the issuance of a plastic card with a magnetic strip, programmed to release the lock on my door, which does not have a cast iron doorknocker. Some twenty-five years ago, when parking became a problem at the University of Oklahoma, faculty members were issued with similar cards for entry to the parking lot. By lunch time on the first day of issue a running buddy of mine in the Electrical Engineering department had produced duplicates, which he gave to selected friends, just in case they lost their originals. Twenty-five years later magnetic strip technology has boomed. It provides the mode of identification and entry through fences all over the world, particularly where money and comfort and convenience are concerned. These strip fence breakers get me money from the bank, into the special person’s lounges at the airport and onto toll roads. They also let one armed bandits separate people from their hard earned earnings.

A famous friend of mine – Nancy Kress – writes science fiction. In one book she address the challenges of security and fences by describing high tech methods of retinal scanning. This ocular fingerprint is unique to the individual who is permitted to enter the protected premises, unless someone else steals it – gross but plausible? Whatever happened to the old fashioned “friend or foe?” I guess labor rates are too high to have people do the screening. People have many other unique characteristics – like voiceprints and dna, and names and faces. “Who is it?” “It’s me,” “Come in, the door’s unlocked.” Nancy’s equally famous husband – Charles Sheffield – told me the key to good science fiction writing: of course there must be a story, but the story should be far enough into the future to stretch the imagination, while remaining plausible and obeying the laws of science. When you go to another planet or out of the solar system, you must address the challenges of time and distance and gravity, there is no magic, just “Borderlands of Science.” But planets and moons have their own fences; try breathing carbon dioxide or vacuum for a while.

Charles Sheffield wrote about the ultimate fence – one around Washington DC, just like the walls of Jericho. This fence, like Europe’s forces and fortresses, addresses the likelihood of attack by land, sea or air. It is a superdome, which allows the game to go on in spite of the weather. Entry and egress through the walls of this ruling ghetto is by a complex system of security barriers. But of course the rulers in the ghetto need to eat, get rid of their trash and occasionally communicate face to face with their constituency when election time approaches. So there are many service workers who have access to both sides of the fence, and therein lies the problem. If you don’t pay the service workers enough then they will sell their services to the bad guys. If you do pay the service guys well they will become mercenaries and sell their services to the bad guys. People are the weak link in the chain fence. They allow Peter Rabbit to squeeze under the gate. In Charles Sheffield’s “Brother to Dragons” the main problem, apart from the rulers in the ghetto, was the nuclear waste in Nebraska. Now it is hard to build fences to keep out radiation, unless they are made of lead, which is very heavy. So you use robots. But robots are dumb and need human guidance. Don’t believe the sci-fi folks; robots can’t think, they do not have souls. Aliens have souls. H. G. Wells in “War of the Worlds” had these great robots marching over the North Downs into London. Charles Sheffield had people with souls inside similar robots that managed the nuclear waste, but bodies don’t like radiation and robots are not made of lead. So this hero gets out of his robot and climbs over the fence and up the mound of radioactive waste, and fries, but saves the world. I must read the story again and get my facts straight.

This morning I went for a run around the Mall, monuments, museums and memorials in Washington DC, city of fences, which is still in the United States of America. I have often done this run, because it is picturesque, stimulating, patriotic and about the right distance to complete before going to a nine o’clock meeting. Over the years I have had nine o’clock meetings in many of this Nation’s Institutions, including the Departments of Transportation, Health, Education, Labor and Commerce, and tomorrow I will visit NASA. The outsides of these buildings are impressive – the tourists say: “wow, what a great country, being administered by people behind these solid stone walls.” The tourists don’t go into these buildings; rather they get to look at the museums, monuments, memorials and the Mall. Sometimes they get to visit the White House and the Capitol, where nothing important happens, but only after they have been allowed through the fences. The places where the tourist can’t go – the Departments - are painted a common, drab, beige, like their inhabitants, who run the country. The place where tourists can go, like the White House and Capitol, are opulent. But after the 9/11 invasion of our sanctity all these buildings are being given royal treatment. There are fences everywhere – someone, more gifted than I, should write a book about these barriers to bombers. Now bombers come in all shapes and sizes and employ different tactics, some just drive up in a truck, like Terry in Oklahoma (I once worked in that building), others squeeze under the fence. So the fences need to be versatile enough to deal with the big things, perceptive enough to deal with the little things and imperceptible enough to pretend to the tourists and Mall joggers that it is business as usual.

I should have gone into the business of fence construction and located my business in this city of fences. The old fashioned verbal fence “keep off the grass” is apparently no longer effective around the Mall. The grassy areas are striped with well-worn diagonal paths. The apparent solution is not to put down asphalt, but rather to close off the whole area until the grass has grown again. The chosen fences are four-foot wooden strips bound together by wire. They can be easily rolled up for transportation. Every ten feet or so they are anchored to the ground by tubular metal poles. Now this form of fencing creates another problem – maintenance. The grass cutters cannot get close to the fence so lengthy grasses and weeds grow to fill these inaccessible areas. In the old days the these areas would have been cleared with scythes or sickles or the distribution of used engine oil, but labor costs, skills and environmental awareness have stopped this game. Now we have whipper-snippers whose thin plastic cord always loses the battle with the harder fence.

Yellow tape and movable railings with legs guard temporary hazards. Elaborate chain link technology provides more permanent borders to longer-term construction and repair areas. 10-foot high wooden boards surround major construction – the construction workers apparently do not like tourists confusing them with zoo animals. Hence the fence. Large concrete and steel blocks surround the concrete and steel buildings. Enough to stop a tank and certainly enough to stop a U-haul full of explosives getting near enough to do damage. Peter Rabbit would take one look at this formidable fence and go and search elsewhere for his lettuce and radishes. Not that there should be no fences around high profile targets. It’s just that in the long run fences don’t work. - Keep off the grass. Cross at the crosswalks. Danger, men at work. Entry prohibited (for no apparent reason.)

The design, construction and decoration of fences need engineering ingenuity, artistic flair and labor. Fences are usually less hazardous than bridges or airplanes in the sense of physical failure, but they hamper operations by selecting out or delaying too many good guys. Fences are made of concrete, metal, electronics and people. They are art forms. I wonder what the historians will say in an age where everybody loves and trusts one another and security is a thing of the ancient past. Fences must have gates, like apple pie and icecream, fish and chips, Darby and Joan. But gates must not be the weak link. So they are built solid with great motors to move them from side to side, up and down or in and out. Clever fences are like filters – just designed to stop the big fish with the big bombs, but allowing the little fish with the little bombs to be caught in the fine nets closer to the buildings. And they swam and they swam, right over the dam. Fences must be pretty, vandals decorate some and their obscure territorial messages are very artistic. The scribblings of small children and the budding talent of older children adorn other fences. “Look daddy, I painted that picture in school, and there’s the one that my friend painted. Ours are much better than those from that other school.” Professional starving artists sometimes get a break by being retained to do their thing on important fences; sometimes the children do a better job for less money. These professional artists often get to display their work in the galleries, museums and gardens around the Mall. They chose the visual arts of painting and sculpture. Now sculpture must be both technically and perceptually challenging. Sculpture is also an attractive target for irreverent scoundrels, however talented, with spray paint cans.

Physical fences are one thing, but information fences are another. You can touch physical fences, but the security fences on your computer are invisible to most users and vulnerable to motivated misusers. In the old days the panel between the engine compartment and the occupant compartment in an automobile was called the firewall, with good reason. Engines get hot and passengers like to be cool. But designers didn’t like the connotation of firewall so they started to call it other things like the dash and the cowl. Old timers still call it the firewall. The firewall on computers is supposed to keep the bad guys out and let the good guys in. The Internet is full of both kinds. Firewalls are full of holes and have patches in all the wrong places, despite the good intentions of these latter day fence builders. At work the firewalls are very fine meshed - they look carefully at both the source and content of the message, and sometimes at the recipient. At home even with the fence set on “high” I cannot keep the spam mongers out of my life. Most of these spam mongers are well meaning – they seek to improve my finances and my personal life and often give me the opportunity to contribute to people in need. Sometimes the spam mongers ask the question “friend or foe?” or “You must be PG 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 to access this website;” so of course all the under 13s, 14s, 15s, 16s, 17s, 18s are tempted to use little white lies for the sake of their education, unless “parental controls” are set on “high”. The city of fences is riddled with uniformed fence minders with their metal detecting batons. Soon the Internet will be riddled with invisible fence minders minding invisible fences. In war they call it collateral damage; statisticians talk about false negatives. Joe Public calls it a nuisance and his libertarian defenders call it an invasion of privacy. We are now afraid of the fences that are designed to see to our best interests will become offences that seek to inconvenience or even harm us. Is there an effective defense against the offensive defense?

The challenge of security is nowhere more evident than in the explosion of airport fences. At some airports the first line of defense is posted a mile down “Airport Boulevard”, next to the “Welcome to Houston” sign. Then you have your car, your luggage and yourself searched with composite fences of metal detectors, explosives detectors and suspicious item detectors. Modern information technology allows your likeness to be linked to vast searching databases, that contain everything from information about your favorite beverage, to your propensity for visiting with suspicious characters, and your bank account and your health account and your worth as a voting individual. Brother! big brother. But as in that fine tale, written fifty years ago about a time twenty years ago, the good guys will find a way to hide from the helicopters and the bad guys will disguise themselves as good guys. Is there no trust anymore? To which Ronald Regan would reply “Trust but Verify.”

The symbolic representation of war is embodied in our modern day gladiatorial competitions. The pure sports, like running, swimming and mountain climbing, simply pitch people against natural fences, and each other, with little chance of uncertain outcomes. Individual success at climbing these fences is inherited at birth and honed by practice. More complex competitions, like baseball, basketball, beachball and football employ human “defenses.” The trick of the offenders is to investigate the fences of the defenders and follow a strategy that will assure the success of the only important mission – winning. Because winning means money to many, and vicarious satisfaction to many more. But winning must be earned, so the fences must be high enough and deep enough to create some level of uncertainty. Sometimes people with no sense of fair play, cheat by buying better players or employing foul tactics. Defenses in baseball are a work of art with much uncertainty. They employ historical data on individual offensive propensities. The implied fences around the plate that separate a ball from a strike sometimes have holes in their sides. In basketball there is a perennial move from zone (or psuedo-zone) to one on one. These fences usually have about 50% success because offensive teams usually shoot about 50%. From time to time the legislators of the game create higher fences by handicapping the offence, now there’s a good strategy. Why not allow goal tending and moving picks?

American football is played mainly with the hands, which are used for handling the ball and the opposing players. Defensive fences are beautiful things, when they work. But offensive fence breaking is what the spectator likes best. The human defensive fences are wide, deep and versatile. The rush stops the offense as, but not before or after, it starts. Late hits and offside are heavily penalized. The common defense is to prevent the rush or to prevent the receiver from getting into a good position for a reception. Defenders can push but not hold. Big and fast defensive lines rule. Even defenders face legislative fences that often leave a lot to the discretionary eyes of the striped shirted fence inspectors. Once the primary fence is broken the secondary comes into play. They have more time to see what is happening. But sometimes the offenders create holes, by strategic blocking or decoys. The hardest fence to build is one to counter the Hail Mary. After all, divine intervention, through a strategy of chance, will succeed, if the right divinity is employed.

People have souls and sometimes these souls can be manipulated to achieve the ends of the leaders of the cause, like re-election. Not many leaders are martyrs. After all they are the symbols of the cause and warrant the building of fences around themselves. How can you build fences around public market places to keep out suicide bombers? How can you keep out laser guided weapons, or smallpox? How important is the cause? How persuasive are the leaders? How resolved are the defenders to build effective fences while still allowing the freedoms on which their cause is based? Why are the causes different? There is enough water to go around. Food production technology only faces the fences of distribution. Fences can be built against reproduction, but then Darwin would have to rethink the implementation of the survival of the fittest reproducers.

The key to good fence building is like any engineering venture – requirements, specifications, verification, validation and evaluation. Specifications and verification are the easy part – build a fence 10 feet tall; is the fence 10 feet tall? Requirements and validation are another matter – build a fence to keep out the bad guys landing at our airports; what does a bad guy look like? what if the bad guy travels by land, air or sea? Evaluation is even more elusive because it may take years to discover whether the requirements for fences were appropriate. What if the bad guys turn out to be good guys, who are just here to overthrow the government and set us all free or provide us with enough mind altering chemicals and brain washing so that we don’t know the difference between democracy and dictatorship and anarchy. The key to good fence building, like all good engineering is to get the requirements right. After that engineering is just a matter of engineering.

Across the road from the Capitol Holiday Inn is the Department of Education. Earlier I said that these beige buildings were filled with the beige people who run our country. But these educators are not beige. The doors of the Department of education are encased in bright red wooden shelters sporting their mission – “No child left behind.” Now of course we would agree that the answer to all our ills is education. 15 year olds giving birth to babies who in turn become 15 year old mothers all without sufficient family, community, city or federal support. The lucky ones go to the Ivy League or the State flagship university, those in the middle are the swing voters who are more interested in their ability to buy SUVs, jogging shoes and home entertainment systems: “It’s the economy, dummy!” The unlucky ones face the biggest fence of all – society. “With freedom and justice for all.” Freedom costs money to jump over, walk around or crawl under the fences. How can education help? Well for a start it would be nice if all children liked school. Why don’t they? Because school is a model for the real world, there are winners and losers and if you are a loser at one game, anyone with half a brain will try another game. Schools and games are just a bunch of fences. “No child left behind?” Why spend time lifting a child over a fence when that fence simply leads to another fence that still does not get him to where he sees himself? Most of the fences in schools are created by a misguided desire to standardize a world full of non-standard people. “Economies of scale” they say. 3000 children cooped up in a school will surely produce a whole bunch of unsuccessful fence climbers. What we need are versatile fences and gates that lead to personal survival and fulfillment. Being a 15-year-old mother, or father, in some societies does not have the stigma that it does in ours. Dropping out of college did not deter Bill Gates. “No child left behind” as measured by standardized tests is a naïve approach to complexity. Inside the red doors of the Department of Education are beige security screens.

The great thing about fences is that they make you stop and think. If you have to build a fence to solve a problem, the fence will eventually fail. Peter Rabbit got to the lettuce and radishes, despite the scritch, scratch of Mr. McGregor’s hoe, a soaking in a plant pot and a terrifying search for the gap in the fence. He was rewarded with chamomile tea.

It is now 2020 and I am rereading this material prior to (self) publication. As I read our President Trump is building a very costly fence along the RIO Grande. When will they ever learn?

**Chapter 15**

**Conned**

I have a couple of neighbors on Amelia Island who are both entertaining and prolific authors – John Grisham and David Baldacci. David Baldacci’s Camel Club theme is continued in my current read – The Collectors. The camel club consists of a bunch of likeable rogues – much like Robin Hood and his merry men – they rob the rich and (sometimes) give to the poor. They are brilliant at the con game as are some of the many small time conmen that pervade modern society.

I flew down to Atlanta from Michigan and looked for a Lyft or Uber ride. I was planning to call for a ride when I arrived at the pick-up point, which was a long walk from the arrivals hall. The area was quite busy with cars, drivers and waiting passengers, although I believe that it is usual for Ride share drivers to line up off site. Before I could call, this driver approached me, implying that he was working with Lyft (he had a Lyft sticker) so I got into the front seat and had a nice chat during the 45 minute ride to my condo. On arrival at my home, the driver pulled out a “Square” instrument and used my credit card to process the fare, which was described as “custom” and quite a bit more than I expected. This “Square” card was new to me – it is a legit and very convenient way of transferring funds via credit cards; apparently it is widely used in small business. Check it out at [www.squareup.com/us/en](http://www.squareup.com/us/en).

The driver Marty Marv was very chatty during the journey. We covered family, politics and travel in some depth, but no sport. When I checked the ride distance with Lyft, I noted that I had paid twice the calculated price. When I checked my credit card this morning , there were no more surprises. I also checked on Marty Marv on the Internet and found a few of them. The most prominent one being a popular musician, but not my genre.

So here is the lesson learned – always call ahead for your rideshare and don’t get conned.

**Chapter 16**

**Cows**

As a small boy of eight or nine I had an occasional job tending cows. I lives in a small village, Sproatley, which had a bunch of mixed arable and dairy farms. One annual job of farmers was to cut back the, usually, hawthorn hedges, clean out the ditches and cut down the often three or four yards of undergrowth. The hedges were cut with an upward stroke of a billhook and the branches carted off to be burned. When this work had finished the hedges had to be laid by making a small notch low down the trunk and bending it over to intertwine with nearby trunks to make an impenetrable hedge. Often there were large gaps left after this pruning and that’s when the cattle tending was needed to keep them from straying into adjacent corn fields or on to the road. So I sat playing with pieces of flint, imagining that they were used as arrow heads by prehistoric people. Sometimes I got distracted and the cows started to wander. OOOOPs, better run. So run I did. At the end of the day I would herd the herd to the field gate, let them out along the road and drive them back to the farm. Sometimes the cows made a mess on the road.

Another job I had when I was a little older was to help with the milking of Mr. Taylor’s cows after I had herded them from Bandy across the road and down to the cow sheds at the bottom of our orchard. My Taylor only had a few cows and did not invest in a milking machine. So you get this clean bucket and a three legged stool, place the bucket strategically, put your head against the cows side and milk the cow until its udder was empty. Easier said than done. The milk was poured into a pasteurizing contraption and then into churns for distribution around the village.

I got a dog for my tenth birthday, a border collie, which I named “Mac”. I remember going with my dad on the bus to a farm in Flinton where there was a litter of puppies available for distribution to little boys who promised to give them good food, plenty of exercise and regular grooming. So we built a kennel in the back yard where the air raid shelter used to be. At weekends I took Mac for walks in the fields where the cows and horses were kept. Now Mac was a natural herder, his ancestors probably won prizes for sheep herding at the local “horse shows” which were annual village events where all aspects of farming were on display, including prize bulls. So Mac used to herd the dozen or so cows to the gate in “Fifteen acre” ready to be taken across the road the Mr. Beadle’s farm for milking. One day Mac tried to hone his herding skills by sniffing the hind leg of Boxer, a large Shire cart horse. Boxer gently lifted his leg then less gently put it down on Mac’s head. The poor dog got sick with a kind of epilepsy so we had to say goodbye.

The milk production business grew big time in the USA with large herds and lots of automation, but nowadays the business is moving to a grand industrial scale with farms in China having tens of thousands of cows. Check out the source of your morning glass of milk. But cows will be cows.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Leisure***byWilliam Henry Davies |  |

 |
|

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|   |

|  |
| --- |
| What is this life if, full of care,We have no time to stand and stare.No time to stand beneath the boughsAnd stare as long as sheep or cows.No time to see, when woods we pass,Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.No time to see, in broad daylight,Streams full of stars, like skies at night.No time to turn at Beauty's glance,And watch her feet, how they can dance.No time to wait till her mouth canEnrich that smile her eyes began.A poor life this if, full of care,We have no time to stand and stare. |

 |

 |

**Chapter 17**

**Cricket**

It is impossible to discuss cricket with an American as they are congenitally incapable of understanding this beautiful game. There is one very clear explanation on a tea towel that I have hanging on the wall of my home office. It goes as follows:

**Cricket** As explained to a foreign visitor:

* You have two sides, one out in the field and one in
* Each man that’s in the side that’s in goes out and when he’s out he comes in and the next man goes in until he’s out.
* When they are all out, the side that’s out comes in and the side that’s been in goes out and tries to get those coming in out.
* Sometimes you get men still in and not out.
* When both sides have been in and out including the not outs
* That’s the end of the game
* Howzat?!

Now some may object to the use of the masculine (man) form to describe a player, but this is merely convenient literary license. In fact, even women, throughout the Commonwealth, unlike foreigners, can play cricket quite well. Also some may object to the exclusion of people from the former British Empire in the generic use of the word “foreigner”. This can be explained by the truism that the British gave three things to the American colonies:

* Language – they messed that up and don’t understand plain English (see below)
* Democratic government – hmmmm?
* Cricket – they turned that into baseball – a game played by little girls in England, called rounders.

Back to cricket and some more specific descriptions:

* Some players are swingers, some are spinners and some are drivers or hookers or keepers with gloves
* A googly is a ball that goes the wrong way when it appears to be going the right way.
* A Chinaman is either a man from China or a left hander’s off break
* A bouncer is intended to make a batsman duck.
* A duck is when a player is out before getting a run.
* A run is when two players change ends, except when there is a no ball or a wide ball, in which cases they stay where they are and get a run without running
* A no ball is when the bowler throws the ball or oversteps
* A yorker is not a man from Yorkshire, rather it a ball that goes in the block ‘ole.
* A wide ball is a directional deformity unlike a long hop
* A long hop is a short bouncer
* With a wide ball, sometimes the first slip catches the ball instead of the catcher, sometimes even the second slip or the leg slip may even catch the ball if it swings a lot.
* The ball only goes to the gully if it catches a thick edge
* A thin edge causes the batsman to stay put while all the members of the other team jump up and down and shout “howzat” and the man in the white coat raises his finger.
* Sometimes a bouncer is accompanied by a silly mid on and a silly mid off.
* There are various kinds of wicket, some are soft, some crumble, some are hard and some are green, others are made of wood and come in threes; sometimes, but not very often, someone may get ten wickets, on other occasions bowler’s wickets may be very costly.
* A maiden is not a female cricketer
* Cricketers sometimes have long legs, sometimes short legs, sometimes square legs and sometimes fine legs because they are not on the off side in which case they may be mid off, long off or silly mid off.
* When cricketers are out they have to wait until next week to get in again
* Tails never fails
* Two horizontal arms communicate a wide, one horizontal arm is a no-ball, one raised finger is out, two raised arms are for a six, but one waving horizontal arm is only four, one patted leg is a leg bye

**Chapter 18**

**Crowd Control**

At our high school reunion a few years ago, I asked Pete Lloyd what he had been doing over the years. “Crowd control”, he quipped, he had been a school teacher! When groups of children, or adults especially, get together they participate in “group think” and sometimes reach a false consensus. The remedy is “leadership” – crowd control, which may involve sanctions or other variants of punishment, from a simple reprimand to the cane. Sometimes these leaders are our teachers, but often they are those colleagues with malicious intent. I shall now reflect on some incidents that some of us would rather forget.

We had a new teacher for our 3rd form Latin – Mr. Sullivan. Now Mr. Sullivan was a nice, tall fresh faced young man, straight out of college. He knew “Mentor” off by heart but failed miserably in crowd control. Now as you will remember, Latin is not particularly exciting, although I found it to be invaluable while I was learning anatomy. So we liked to add a bit of entertainment to the class by dropping pencils and rulers on to the floor. The practice escalated to pushing books, such as Mentor, on to the floor with a resounding slap. Eventually Mr. Sullivan’s composure broke when he caught one of our classmates, who shall remain anonymous, in the act. The guilty party was ordered to the front of the class and commanded to touch his toes. The angry Mr. Sullivan delivered six of the best and believed that he had established crowd control. Not a chance. A short time later the girls’ hockey team played against the staff and Mr. Sullivan showed considerable skill. The crowd of unruly onlookers took up the chant - 2-4-6-8 who do we appreciate? G-I-L-B-E-R-T! The headmaster, during assembly the following day, gave the whole school a lecture on the importance of good behavior and respect for one’s elders and teachers. The individual perpetrators were never captured, but you know who you are.

There were a few other teachers who resorted to the cane, either to the hand or backside. One teacher used a short strap on an innocent Johnny Bernsten’s hand. Now Johnny was my friend, a good footballer. Mr. Greenhalgh, the punisher, was also into football but less accomplished than he thought. This incident made me very sad. These punishments were often the prerogative of the headmaster, Mr. Parslow or his deputy, Mr. Croft, I recall. They were fairly rare events at MLHS thankfully. Another incident that did not escalate to caning, but perhaps should have, was when we took a school trip to the Reckitt’s factory. Andrew’s father worked there as a graphic artist and you may still see the sword he drew on a bottle of Dettol. Anyway, some of our classmates started to fill their pockets with small items from around the factory. These misbehaviors were noticed and everybody was told to empty their pockets, which resulted in quite a large haul of evidence. There were other incidents of stealing from center city shops that went unnoticed. Why do children steal? I must add that, although tempted, my Sunday school teachings were generally successful, except perhaps for the odd apple from neighbors’ orchards.

Spare the rod and spoil the child. When I was in elementary school, I once “got the cane” for going outside to play in the rain without my hat. Recently a young lady in a neighboring country, that was once a British colony, was sent to jail and caned because she got pregnant out of wedlock. Caning is barbaric.

As prefects, our main duties were crowd control, by personality or by the threat or implementation of sanctions. We kept order in the corridors, in the school yard, in the assembly hall and in the dining room. We communicated our importance by wearing different hats and ties. We sat on the stage during assembly; we had a room all to ourselves behind the stage. We trained to be leaders of men. Crowd controllers. On one occasion I had to deal with school yard bullying. The situation escalated and I had to put this bigger than me fifth form bully on his back. I was a legend in my own mind, a hero, a failure at crowd control.

At this stage I must confess that I once again failed very badly in my performance and behavior in crowd control. Between my first career in physiotherapy and my return to university to study ergonomics, I spent a year as a school teacher in Birmingham. My formal assignment was to teach physical education and English in the aptly named Hope Street School, which was in Balsall Heath, an inner city district with a low reputation. I marched my students along Hope Street to the local church hall for gym lessons, the other way along the street and across the busy main road to the swimming pool and along the notorious Varna Road to the playing fields. One day it was raining and the girls were using the school hall so I had to conduct my lesson in a classroom. I chose to discuss the finer points of badminton, not a good choice. There was this big youth who was clearly the leader among his classmates who chose, probably because of lack of interest in the finer points of badminton, to disrupt the class. My attempts to discourage his antics escalated to the point where I threatened the cane, clearly another poor choice. So as the whole situation began to get out of hand I marched the boy off to our rather ineffective headmaster and recounted the gist of the story. I signed the punishment book and gave the boy two on each hand. He said to me “you only hit me because I’m coloured.” On reflection this action probably led to an increase in his status with his followers. He may have forgotten the incident 50 years later, but I have not forgotten my failure in crowd control. At Hope Street, we had a diminutive music teacher who treated misbehavior by having the student put his or her hands on their heads for a long period. She was remarkably effective where other teachers were pathetic in their attempts to manage these inner city children with unfortunate backgrounds. My boys’ cricket and soccer teams won the city championships.

I was faced with other crowd control incidents while I was at Hope Street. I took a bunch of students on a youth hostelling holiday to the Lake District. We had a poor start when a couple of boys unscrewed the bulbs from the train compartment ceilings and threw them on to the track. I was able to persuade the guard that this was simply high spirits and that it wouldn’t happen again. Mostly we had a great time in the Lakes despite the rain, but managing a bunch of teenagers on a mountain side is like herding cats. One particularly energetic boy ran down a hillside and tripped and broke his arm. I had to hitch hike to Workington to have it X-rayed and put in plaster. On our return to Birmingham I took the boy to his home in Varna Road. I handed him over to his mother who was clearly dressed for business.

While at Malet Lambert, we experienced many other crowd misbehaviors while watching the city’s football and rugby teams. All that is needed is the situation and the spark, the potential is everywhere. I believe that I am a little better at controlling large classes nowadays, especially if I ignore their non-disruptive use of cell phones to text their friends.

**Chapter 19**

**Doors**

Most people are familiar with their own front door because they see it every day, that is if they go out every day. Front doors are somewhat personal, some are very ornate, and they come in a wide variety of colors, I like bottle green doors. Visitors knock on the front door when they come to see you. Representatives of service organizations like the butcher, the baker and the candle stick maker along with the postman also knock on the front door to deliver their goods, that is if you live in my village, Sproatley, 70 years ago. Sometimes we used to get telegrams; in fact I used to deliver the occasional telegram to the front doors of people living in Flinton, Humbleton and even the big house at Burton Constable Hall. The Hall doors had very big, ornate double doors at the front, but I usually went round the back as the front doors were only used on ceremonial occasions.

In my house in Sproatley, it was called Mill House, only visitors and service people came to the front door, family and friends usually came down the garden path to the back door, except for weddings and funerals. The back door was plain but solid with, I believe, four panels. It opened into a little lean-to shed where we kept out boots and brushes, and sometimes our top coats. This little leant-to had three doors, one, on your right, leading to the back yard leading to the garden path, the other, on your left led to the wash house and of course the door into the house. The wash house was a largeer lean-to with a sloping tiled roof. At the far end of the wash house we had a cold water tap installed to replace the hand pump at the other end of the garden path. A gully ran down the center of the wash house to a drain near the back yard. Behind the tap adjacent to the wash house, standing under a lilac tree was the two seater lavatory. This was replaced by an inside toilet and bath when we were connected to the main drains, shortly after the war. These toilet doors were pretty plain but functional, although I recall they didn’t have locks on the inside.

Following the front door – back door tradition, my school had a very grand double front door which was reserved for important people, and somewhat less ornate back doors, one for the boys leading off the boys yard and one for the girls, leading off the girls yard. Inside the school the staff rooms had solid doors but the classrooms had windows in them so you could look in if you were on corridor duty or just walking smartly along the right hand side of the corridor. We got the opportunity to study the staff room and headmaster’s doors from time to time, especially if we misbehaved in class and were sent to the powers that were for second tier discipline.

We used a double decker bus to travel to school in the city during the 1950s. The bus didn’t have a back door, rather there was a large platform that allowed one to turn left to go to the lower level or go straight up the stairs to the upstairs. The platform provided space for a dozen riders, tightly packed, when the rest of the bus was full; there was no standing in the aisle upstairs. If one was late to the bus stop, one could run and jump onto the platform.

Now I could go on all day about trap doors, garage doors, barn doors, shop doors, movie theater doors, rabbit hutch door, glass doors, metal doors and so on and so on, but I’ve come to the end of the page so I’ll have to offer more on the exciting world of doors on another occasion.

**Chapter 20**

**Eggs**

As a child, I used to collect bird’s eggs. Only one from each nest and be careful not to touch the others! For my tenth birthday, I got a book called “British Birds and their Haunts”; it described all about sizes, colors, beaks, habitats, migration, sounds, nests and eggs, and a lot of other stuff. It would make a great college course; just think of all the tests you could make. These kind of authors really must love their subject, and do a lot of homework. Me, I just think of a word and then write a lot of gobbledygook along obscure connections.

Back to eggs. Also when I was a little boy, about five, I was given a boiled egg and immediately threw up. Think about it, egg throw up makes a big mess, all over the table cloth:

*The****boiled****-****egg smell****comes from****sulfur****in the****egg****white, which creates hydrogen sulfide gas if it reacts with iron in the****egg****yolk, according to Exploratorium.edu.*

I did used to eat egg and milk – you just put a raw egg in some milk and beat it up with a fork; you can even get a special plunger, just made for the job. Nowadays, I eat poached eggs and omelets especially with cheese and onions, and, occasionally, scrambled eggs diluted with grated cheese, but definitely no boiled eggs.

I remember painting hard boiled eggs and then rolling them down a grassy hill or across a lawn or putting green. At Easter time, our parents used to hide them around the house and garden for us to find. Eggs don’t go very far if you hit them with a driver but sometimes you can get good distance with a pitching wedge. You can also throw a raw egg against a wall or unsuspecting person and making a big mess. A good test of skill is to juggle eggs – start with two, then try three; this game also makes a mess.

Eggs are an important ingredient for baking; you can find many recipes in recipe books and sometimes in those glossy magazines that are to be found on coffee tables. I like fried egg and chips.

When I was little living in Sproatley, the center of the universe, we had a large garden and orchard. We lived in Mill House with my uncle Walter’s family during the war. We had two chicken houses in the orchard, made of wood with netting for the chicken run. Inside the chicken house we had boxes with straw for the chickens to lay their eggs in. Also in the chicken house were poles that served as perches; below the perches there were boards for the chickens to poop on and for me to clean once a week. I put the mixture of straw and poop in a wheel barrow and trucked into the corner of the garden to the muck heap. We let it rot and grow mushrooms before we spread it around to grow potatoes and carrots and every vegetable you can imagine. These are the by products of egg manufacturing.

So much for eggs; I’m sure that there is much more to say, perhaps another day, but I am at the end of the page, so bye for now.

**Chapter 21**

**“English”**

“Put some English on it.” In baseball, the pitcher imparts spin on the ball which causes the boundary layer of air to break down more quickly on one side thus causing the ball to swerve. Similar practices are seen in snooker (and billiards), tennis, golf and football (soccer). In cricket, an English game, the bowler polishes one side of the ball on his (or her) flannels, points the, vertical, seam one way (or another), thus making the ball swing. In both games the purpose is to deceive the batsman regarding the precise trajectory of the ball, a prerequisite for a successful stroke. The expression “English” may be stretched to other contexts implying that a little “extra” is added to a communication to add meaning, or to deceive. Why “English”? Is it a derogatory or a complimentary expression, or either? or both?

“English” generally refers to the people who live, or were born, in England, like me. It also describes the language spoken there and throughout what was once the British Empire, created through superior naval power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, India, Burma, Malaysia, Nigeria, Egypt, Hong Kong and a few more places are colored in pink in my 1940’s school atlas (about 25% of the world’s population.) Before 1776, the Americans would have also been somewhat pink, perhaps blended with a bit of French and Spanish colors. But the Americans butchered this beautiful language. Now that I live in America I am often greeted with the comment: “I like your accent.” I usually reply” “It’s you what got the accent, me duck.”

Each of these, now independent, countries added a little “English” to the language, often called an “accent”. Around the United Kingdom – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - there are unique dialects. Even within England it may be difficult to understand the spoken language of people from Yorkshire, Tyneside, London, Cornwall, the West Midlands and other localities. These differences were amusingly highlighted by the efforts of Professor Henry Higgins to correct the speech of Eliza Doolittle in “My Fair Lady”. Ironically, Rex Harrison was born in Lancashire, whose people have their own unique dialect, but, like many “educated” English, adopted “Oxford English” as their “proper” way of speaking. English is still the *de facto* international language, despite efforts for more than 100 years to develop Esperanto as a truly international language.

I enjoyed geography, and my atlas, during my school days under the kindly tutelage of the eccentric Edgar Naylor. But I was less enamored by English Language and English Literature. I have now arrived at the considered opinion that English Literature, including efforts by William Shakespeare, H G Wells, William Wordsworth and Charles Sheffield to name a (very) few, was invented to entertain and inform. However, English Language was created to punish little boys. If one didn’t score 7/10 on the weekly test of tenses, declensions, conjugations, participles, prepositions, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, predicates, conjunctions, subjects, objects etc. etc. etc. one got to stand outside the staff room door and wait for Miss Mair to give you a retake. Latin is more systematic; (Nominative, Vocative, Accusative, Genitive, Dative and Ablative, Present, Future, Future Perfect, Imperfect, Perfect Pluperfect etc.), why don’t we all learn to speak Latin? Or Greek, but not Chinese, I tried that once.

Through or because of their maritime superiority, including the Battle of Trafalgar (1805), the British had considerable influence on World History. They painted the globe red. They taught the world English, although both the English themselves and many other nationalities have butchered that language. They also taught the world about democratic government and parliamentary procedure; look what a mess the Western world has made of that institution! Classroom dictators (teachers and prefects), through the cane and the requirement of “lines”, “stand in the corner” and detention, also miss the point that education is about learning, perhaps with a little teaching. The English also carried their religion around the world, which has created opportunities for disagreement and conflict. Perhaps the best example of English goodwill to the world was the introduction of cricket, including the “Chinaman”, which has stood the test of time throughout the old Empire, although the Americans were responsible for the ultimate sacrilege – they mistook cricket for the gentile little girls game of rounders and turned it into baseball.

The interested reader should seek out the following:

H G Wells, “The Outline of History”; Brendan Sims, “Europe”; Robert M Adams, “The Land and Literature of England”; Robert Andrews et al, “Britain”; James Herriot, “Dog Stories”.

**Chapter 22**

**Ergonomics**

I have been an ergonomist for more than 50 years, but will try to confine the description of this most satisfying pursuit to one page. Ergonomics is about people, technology, contexts and time. It is about analysis, design, simulation and evaluation. It is about bodies, minds and souls. It is about variability in all these things. It means different things to different people. It is about the design of chairs in kindergartens, classrooms, offices, dining rooms, bars, cars and airplane cockpits. It is about fixing the sitters’ heads, hands and feet in the right location to do their things. But there are big people and little people and often one size has to suit all comers because the task may not be dependent on physical characteristics. So what are the rules? Anthropometry? Nah! Tradition? Probably! What is the solution? Adjustability? But that costs money and may have maintenance problems. So one size fits all!?

Professors, consultants, designers and other investigators are expected to provide answers. But in the Ergonomics 101 challenge of chair design we are already faced with failure, because of variability among people, technology, contexts and times. So we depend on adaptability of the intended users and predicted misusers to solve the small or big problems generated by one size fits all. The barber adds a small plank to his chair; the dentist has high priced gizmos to put his drill where your mouth is. The traffic policeman may give you 5mph leeway, or not. Chairs are the starting point. Indeed my first ergonomics project in 1964 was to use psychophysics to determine how accurately people could judge the height of chairs. Moving on to holding, lifting, carrying, pulling and pushing adds the science of biomechanics to our armory. And working, running, sleeping and eating add work physiology to the mix; thus adding more variability and the demand for adaptability in design, evaluation and rewards. Yes wages. When I was a teenager, I worked on a farm and was expected to move sheaves to stooks, then to the stack and on to the threshing machine with the regular farm hands. But, because I was young, I got paid in true Marxist fashion, according to my age not my productivity. Yorkshire farmers are thrifty.

So much for physical characteristics, capabilities and limitations. But what about our senses? I have had surgery to provide effective long sight and $1 reading glasses to lose all around the house. I need hearing aides but am reluctant to pay the price. What did you say? Smelling, tasting and feeling seem to be adequate. But eyes need light to see tiny and fast moving things, ears prefer signal to noise. And then we have to recognize what we see, based on our mixed up memories, and after all that mental jiggery-pokery we have to decide what to think, say, write or do, then do it, then check if it was the right thing to think, do, write or say. And then we have to learn to do better next time when we are faced with similar information in a similar context or adapt our decisions and responses to new situations. Finally, our peers and audiences will judge us for what we have done, and we will be applauded or criticized. We of course will thank or criticize the designer. So the purpose of ergonomics is to see that the interactions among people, technology, contexts and time are effective and efficient, while also being safe, satisfying and sustainable. All this in an ocean of variability. Murphy was right, if something can be done wrong then someone will do it wrongly. Our customers – designers and users - often outthink us and find a better way. So the trick is to observe our customers, and learn. Ergonomists will have job security so long as they don’t fall too far behind that eight ball.

**Chapter 23**

**Fish**

Eileen's been gone for ten days so I get to experiment in the kitchen. I looked in the freezer and saw a nondescript piece of fish that had been beaten up by the comings and goings in that compartment for quite some time now. The package was torn and one end had a severe case of freezer burn. The label didn't tell me anything; I had never heard of the species. And now I've thrown the packet away we shall never know. I've never been particularly fond of fish, it is too strong for my delicate palette. Except, as many of you will know, I am particularly fond of fish and chips. In fact, to paraphrase Will Rogers, I've never met a fish and chip I didn't like. The thing about fish and chips is that the fish are coated in batter and then, like the chips, cooked in deep fat. This process takes away the strong fishy flavor, especially when soaked in salt vinegar and eaten out of a newspaper wrapping.

It took quite a few years for me to even start eating fish and chips. I was a skinny, picky child; my mother kept a don't like book which was full from cover to cover. We had a fish and chip shop near the village green in the center of Sproatley, a collection of one hundred and ninety-three souls when the men returned from work in the city. This was because there were quite well paying jobs in the city and the farms were rapidly being mechanized and thus provided less employment opportunities. Anyway life in the village was good, we had fields to play in and the world’s greatest fish and chip shop, owned by Mrs. Barker, ably helped by her husband, Mr. Barker and sister in law Mrs. Butler. The fish and chip shop was open on Wednesday and Saturday evenings and at lunch time on Saturday. The mornings were spent peeling and chopping potatoes and carving large chunks of lard to put into the coal fired fryers.

I was a small child, perhaps because of my aversion to all food except bread and treacle and chips. The headmaster at the Sproatley Endowed School, Mr. "Gilly Gaffer" Thompson, named me Giant. My height was something of a problem at the fish and chip shop. I could not see over the high counter, behind which Mrs. Barker and Mrs. Butler sweated profusely as they tended the fire and the fryer. There was always a queue winding round the customer area and sometimes out to the sidewalk. When my turn came I would reach up and slap my three penny bit on the top of the counter and ask for threepenn'th of chips, with vinegar. The chips were placed in a little paper packet and then wrapped in the Hull Daily Mail to keep warm. If I was lucky I would get the sports page and relive the victory of my idols - the Tigers.

Mrs. Barker was a creative cook. Nothing wasted, nothing wanted. She made patties with the left overs. A bit of sage and who would know the difference? This was my introduction to fish. Sometimes the patties were mostly potato but when there was fish left over we had fish patties. With a bit of added sage and this and that who would know the difference. Not I. I began to like these patties, made of mashed potatoes and this and that and I soon began to buy them instead of chips. They were round and fried on a hot plate. Delicious.

Now for those of you who do not know Sproatley, it is a small village some eight miles from the center of Kingston upon Hull, which in those days was the world’s largest fishing port as well as the home of the Tigers. There was some rivalry for this global claim from a small town in Lancashire where, unbeknown to me at the time, my one day wife lived. As a fishing port and a Football team Fleetwood could never aspire to even polishing the boots of my Tigers. They still run a poor second in both fishing and football, although they are the home of the world-famous Fisherman's Friend, a tasty lozenge. Back in those days Hull was home to almost 200 trawlers. They dashed out along the Humber, up the North Sea and on to Iceland for the cod and haddock. When their nets and holds we're full they would turn around and sprint back to Hull, where the crew would get to relax with a pint of Hull Brewery Ale. But times were changing. Large freezer vessels were being introduced. They sat up in the Cold North Atlantic being served by the scurrying trawlers, who would have to stay away from home until the freezer vessel was full. The life of a trawler man was unforgiving. It was cold, hard and dangerous work. In those days I didn't understand where the fish came from and why people sang this hymn in church:

Eternal Father, strong to save,

Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,

Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep

it's own appointed limits keep.

Oh hear us when we cry to thee

For those in peril on the sea.

The sentiment is relived in the film about fishermen from New Bedford, Massachusetts - " The Perfect Storm"

Now I eat fish and chips frequently, cooked by English, American, Japanese, Chinese and Indonesian cooks. Modern trawling is somewhat safer. But back to my culinary masterpiece with this nondescript fish. I fried it well in a covered frying pan and boiled some potatoes, carrots, green beans and an onion, with added sage. Drained the water from the vegetables - tasty soup for starters. Mashed the fish and vegetables and made patties with a little flour for binding. Fried them in a skillet, sprinkled them with vinegar and washed them down with cheap red wine.

**Chapter 24**

**Fishing**

Most mornings I run along the beach on Amelia Island; sometimes I go around the Southern tip, sometimes to the offshore island and back and sometimes up to Burney Road and back. From time to time I come back along the footpath that runs along A1A. Most mornings I see at least half a dozen people fishing, sometimes on their own and sometimes with their wives. They park their pickups on the beach between the no driving signs. Most of them have three or more rods. They cart their fishing paraphernalia in a small hand cart along with a folding chair – an essential component of the fisherman’s armory. They cast out their hooks and lines, I’m not sure what bait they use, and from time to time pull them in and start all over again. I have never seen any of them with actual fish. Perhaps fishing is not about fish, rather it is about getting up early in the morning with their gear in their pickups and enjoying the peace and quiet of the beach and the ocean. There are some fishing rods in my garage, perhaps I should try them out some day.

When I was young, I used to go fishing in Burton Constable Lake, with my pal Billy Fletcher whose dad worked on the Burton Constable Estate. It was a big estate that used to include three or four villages including Sproatley. We paid about three Pounds a year to rent Mill House, which is down Park Road which leads to the lake and over the bridge to the Burton Constable Hall. We used a flat bottomed punt to fish patiently and successfully in the lake. Mostly we caught perch and roach. One day as we slowly drifted along, I saw a big tench resting on the lake floor in about two feet of water. I dangled my worm on its nose, but it ignored me. So I took out my net and scooped it up; I believe that this capture is a no – no among fishermen, but I didn’t let on until now. I recall that I took it home and my mother deboned and fried it for supper. One day we caught two big pike. I felt the tug on my line, pulled the rod quickly and hooked the varmint, caught it in my net and deposited it on the floor of the punt where it proceeded to make a fuss. We had to remove the hook but they have a nasty set of teeth which could make a big mess of a little boy’s fingers, so I used a rod rest to bang it just behind its head. Pike have a lot of bones which took an age to extract, but it is delicious when sautéed in butter, with a little salt.

When I was a teenager I was invited on a trip to Scotland with my friend David and his family to play golf and go trout fishing. As I didn’t have a fly rod, my dad borrowed one from a friend in the next village. Now when we arrived at the river in North East Scotland I quickly realized that my technique was lacking in finesse. I put the fly on the hook and made what I thought was a graceful cast, but the rod snapped just beyond the reel. So that was the end of my fishing holiday. I did not fare much better on the golf course. My friend was (still is) very good at golf, having taken lessons at an early age; in fact he went on to represent England with his plus three handicap during his university years. Once again I excelled by breaking a wooden shafted club. These catastrophes aside, it was a very memorable holiday in the Scottish Highlands.

That is about the limit of my personal fishing history; there may have been the odd adventure in between but I don’t recall the details. My cousin, Ken, was a real fisherman – he was the captain of a trawler that sailed from Hull to Iceland to catch cod. The movie “The Perfect Storm” portrays the hazards of this occupation in great detail. Alas the trawler fishing industry in both Hull and Fleetwood died with the introduction of mega freezer boats that could stay out for weeks in the North Atlantic catching cod and halibut. I do like fish and chips and I do have a bunch of rods in may garage.

**Chapter 25**

**Football**

Football is a game played mostly with the feet, sometimes with the head or chest and, if you are a goalkeeper or taking a throw in, you may use your hands. In America they play a game called football with their hands and feet. The Americans are also learning how to play soccer, which is their name for football; indeed recently the US Women’s team won the world cup. Since arriving in the USA, in 1981, I have played, coached and refereed the game that is played with the feet, and, while I lived in Oklahoma, watched the College National Champions at their best playing the game with their hands, feet and heads.

While I worked at the University of Oklahoma I served on the appointments and promotions committee for the Department of Industrial Engineering. My main achievement during that time was to hire Deji Badiru, who has since had an outstanding career in academia and, what is more important in the current context, he and I played together on the Crusaders adult league football team. In his first game, Deji scored four goals! He also wrote a book entitled “The Physics of Soccer”. I have two chapters in this book – one on “The Seventeen Steps to Supersonic Soccer” and the other on soccer coaching.

I shall address, briefly, a few of these steps which are best achieved by playing, although the games may be supplemented by various exercises. Unfortunately some coaches are of the opinion that these “supplemental exercises” are the most important – so that they can spend 90% of the practice session explaining the “supplemental exercises” while the players dutifully stand in a line and listen. The purpose of education is learning although many teachers see the purpose of education to be employment. Learning in this context, is best achieved by doing.

It should be noted that, as there is only one ball, 22 players and 90 minutes in a football game, each player only gets, on average, 90/22 = 4.090909090909 minutes of actual playing time, but is, or should be, tired at the end of the game because of all the running “off the ball”, anticipating or creating the next situation.

My approach to coaching, training, practice and playing is to use “squashed squares”. The players form groups of four of their own choosing. Because they will be moving for the next hour or so, sometimes the “square” of four players gets a little squashed. Even during a dynamic game you can find lots of these “squares” – one player with the ball, two (at least) available to receive a pass and the fourth covering behind the player with the ball.

Here are suggestions for a coaching / practice session:

* Have one ball and one cone for each player
* Make targets or goals around the field with the cones
* Play “keep away” with one player in the middle and three passing the ball
* Play 2 on 2 keep away, moving and passing around the field
* Have 1 on 1 kicking competitions, left foot, right foot, punt, throw, on the ground, in the air, instep or outside of the foot, with various distances from 5 to 50 yards
* Have 2on2 kicking competitions with various distances from 5 to 50 yards
* Have occasional races of various distances, using the field markings
* Use the cones as targets or goals and play 1on1, 2on2, 4on4 minigames
* Play 4 on4 minigames using the whole field
* Have shooting practice with cones and goals (always have a player behind the “goal” so you don’t waste time collecting the balls)
* Play, move, talk and laugh
* Never have players stand in line

**Chapter 26**

**Gardening**

When I was a very little boy I remember riding a tricycle along a short path next to a greenhouse behind 11 Whitworth Street in Hull. Then, in 1939, the bombs started to drop, so my family, along with my uncle’s family, moved out of town to Mill House, Park Road in the small village of Sproatley(pop 193), where we built an air raid shelter because the bombs were still dropping all around us, next to the earth toilet and lilac tree in the small back yard. We built two chicken houses in the large orchard, which had apples, pears, damsons, gooseberries, brambles and lots of nettles. Next to the house was a large garden divided into unequal halves by a path made out of ashes from the coal fire. We also had a well and a water pump. The whole shebang was surrounded by large hawthorn hedges, which needed cutting. Because there was a war going on there was food rationing so we had to grow a lot of our own food, including pigs, chickens and rabbits and all sorts of vegetables, plus rhubarb, raspberries, mushrooms and roses. Once a year we guided our pigs along Park Road, past the village green and the baker’s shop to the butcher’s. I learned about gardening the old fashioned way, by gardening, with a little help from my dad! Gardening consists of planning, digging, planting, labeling, waiting, weeding and harvesting. Little kids like me mostly got to do the weeding, until they got big enough to dig.

Our village school master – Mr. Thompson – lived in a cottage attached to the Sproatley Endowed School. There was a large garden behind the school, an even larger one in front and little ones at the side and back. Mr. Thompson considered gardening to be an important part of the curriculum, so twice a week we children learned to dig, hoe, trim and plant. Mr. Thompson got to gather.

This horticultural education and practice grew into farm work with horses and carts and later tractors and carts, and cows and chickens and geese and pigs and sheep. We did hedging and ditching, and stooking and stacking, and threshing and baling, and cleaning out the cow sheds and pig sties. This part time and holiday work continued for fifteen years until I left for national service, then college and then marriage. We bought a home of our own in Birmingham which had a very small garden for a few vegetables and lots of roses. I built a greenhouse for grapes and tomatoes.

I didn’t really do much gardening for the next 15 years when we bought a house in Michigan on 15 acres of woodlands and pasture. I rode the mower around the lawn and to cut pathways through the fields and woods. Meanwhile Eileen became an avid gardener and we made ponds and rockeries and grew beautiful flowers and roses. Then we went away to Houston, Prescott and Singapore while the tenants ignored the garden. Now we have a “lawn service” that cuts the grass and we weed a few beds and the rockery.

Our home on Amelia Island sits under a lot of trees which rain leaves, so my most important gardening chore is to blast them with my leaf blower. The rest of yard is covered with subtropical shrubs which don’t need much attention other than an occasional haircut. I did plant some potatoes this year; well see how they do in a couple of weeks when we get back from Bangladesh.

**Chapter 27**

**Golf**

In 1955, I was invited to join my friend, David, and his family on a trip to the Scottish highlands to play golf and go fly fishing. David was already an accomplished golfer and later progressed to International standards. I was somewhat of a rabbit although I could swing a cricket bat successfully. I had fished in the local gravel pits and Burton Constable lake, but that was with a short rod and worms, none of this fancy fly casting. So being game, I borrowed some golf clubs, from Dave and a fly rod from a friend of my dad’s. I broke 100 on the golf course and broke the borrowed rod on the river. I recall travelling to Aldborough with my father on the bus to return the broken rod. The man was very understanding – the rod was a family heirloom that they had never used.

I lived in a large old house in Leeds for a few years in my early twenties. This house was home to about twenty men - students, office folk and retirees. We ate breakfast and dinner in the communal dining room served by the owner and her brother. On weekends a few of us charged the local, Kirkstall, municipal course and hacked the hillsides mercilessly. I joined a group of reprobates – members of the Mal – de Mer club – on their annual jaunt to the Scilly Isles to play golf and cricket and football against the locals. By this time my swing had improved somewhat, and with help from a little handicap, actually won the stroke play competition. I still have the pewter tankard.

When I went to Loughborough for my second stint as a student, I lived in Royce Hall which was adjacent to the relatively unused University golf course. I ran round this 9 hole golf course most mornings and played around in the evenings before dinner – another men only ritual, with formal dress on Thursdays. The hall warden, himself a respectable player suggested that I had considerable talent and a good swing, all I needed for the big time was a little more guidance and a lot more practice. I developed a respectable swing and worked on a research project with a top golfer, looking at the ability to correct on the downswing. We used electromyography which I also applied to walking with crutches: "A Myographic and Photographic Study of Walking with Crutches": Physiotherapy, pp. 264-268 (1966).

Many years later, in the early 2000s, I lived in a condominium, in Prescott, Arizona, that backed up to a golf course. This again offered a venue for a picturesque morning run and contributed to my new found hobby of collecting abandoned golf balls. I still have hundreds of those little white (and occasionally yellow) nuggets. I used these nuggets as “entities” when I taught a manual introduction to discrete event simulation.

I now live in golf heaven – Amelia Island – there are half a dozen courses within a stones’ throw. I have a low handicap neighbor (+3) and two sets of clubs in the garage, but the three digit green fee has frightened me off. Alas, the world has been robbed of what could have been an icon……..

**Chapter 28**

**IDK**

One morning, many years ago (1962) at the Birmingham Accident Hospital and Rehabilitation Center, a young patient was sent upstairs by the ER doctor to the Physiotherapy Department with a cryptic note “IDK, provocative knee exercises.” Now “IDK” can stand for “Internal Derangement of the Knee” or “I don’t know”. The patient hobbled up in the elevator with his right knee straight and a walking stick in his right hand. First I suggested that he could try with the stick in the other hand, which seemed to please him. Next I invited him to sit on a chair and bend and stretch his knee, but his knee wouldn’t bend. So I helped him down onto a mat in the gym and encouraged him to pretend to cycle; still no luck. So I escalated the confrontation to “provocative”. Standing up and down from the chair; doing deep knee bends, and kicking a football against a wall. This produced lots of complaints of pain all around but minimal bending and no clicks that could have suggested a torn medial meniscus, although clicking knees have many other causes. So I sent him back down stairs to the house surgeon with the confirmed IDK. At lunch time I had to go out on an errand, and as I walked to the place where I stored my bike, I saw the patient walking in the same direction, but with his left leg straight and his stick in his left hand. He proceeded to strap his stick to the bicycle handlebar, mount the bike and ride away happily. So I wrote another note to the house surgeon “NIDK” or “Now I do Know” – the diagnosis should read “compensationitis – return to work.”

This morning, I am sitting by the fire in Florida. My daughter and her family are visiting for the New Year. They are happily reading and from time to time walking to the trough for sustenance. My daughter strikes up a conversation with “my knee hurts.” “Where and when?” I said. When I get up and all around here” she said, rubbing her hands vaguely around the inside of her knee, round the back and then up the front” Mother joined in with a description of chronic pain in her knee and offered the reminder that her mother had bad knees, perhaps due to standing at the loom in the weaving factory all day when she was young. Now this familial similarity suggests a hereditary disorder, but I will be cautious before drawing this conclusion. I ask a bunch of questions, have them explain more details as they waggle their knees through various contortions, while explaining that knees rotate in the flexed posture. In the end, I conclude that these are moderately severe cases of “IDK” and the best thing to do would be to ride a stationary bike while watching television or reading a book in order to strengthen the quadriceps, run up and down stairs fifty times a day and take Ibuprophen if it hurts too much. Or if all else fails, go and see a doctor.

So this is a story about then and now, what goes around, comes around, blame your parents. But most of all it is about “IDK”

**Chapter 29**

**Injuries**

Looking back over my athletic career, it appears that I must be somewhat injury prone given a rate of 8 incidents and a few near misses over 60 years. Although none of these injuries were life threatening or even disabling, some could have been; so please indulge a little exaggeration here and there. In 1945 Bruce Woodcock, from nearby Doncaster, won the British and Empire championship, so my uncle Walter and my dad erected a boxing ring under the damson tree in our orchard and invited a bunch of village lads to demonstrate their stuff. I was about 7 at the time and eager to show my talents, but someone punched me on the nose, and put an end to my aspirations. Later at the grand age of about 16, Mr. Swainston introduced boxing in our gym class at Malet Lambert; my friend Dave, punched me on the nose, despite the warning to keep our guard up and our punches low. Moving forward to the grand old age of 22, about 20 men of all ages were living in a boarding house in Leeds. We cleared away the tables, donned the gloves, and guess what, I got punched on the nose again. I now realize that boxing is only for fools!

We used to walk home from school past the church and hardware store, then across “the Wire” past Refolds’ stack yard to the Blue Bell Inn at the top of the hill in Sproatley. Usually we kicked a tennis ball as we walked in preparation for growing up and playing football for Hull City. Anyway this hardware store dog was slavering at the mouth and took offence when I went into his yard to collect my tennis ball. He bit me on the thigh. Nasty. So my dad took me to the village nurse and then to the doctor in the next village to get a tetanus shot. Shortly after (or was it before) that incident I was happily clowning on the kitchen rug in front of the fire where we boiled a kettle of water to make tea and wash the dishes. When the kettle had boiled it was placed on a pull out stand next to the oven. So I crossed my legs, stood up, fell down, right on the kettle. Again the village nurse leapt into action – she had heard my painful shout at the other end of the village. We used to go to school in short shorts in those days so I was a hero for a while.

A few years later we went fishing one Saturday morning to some gravel pits a few miles away. (I think I have told this story before). Anyway we were clowning as usual, demonstrating our ability to ride our bikes with no hands. Unfortunately I forgot that ‘riding’ includes steering and I hit a small ditch and went over the handlebars. My little finger pointed sideways, so we rode home and waited for my dad to take me on the bus to the Hull Royal Infirmary where they realigned my finger and put half my arm in a plaster. Everybody and his brother signed the plaster and I was a hero in my own mind again for a couple of weeks.

I recall two, maybe more, football injuries. The first was one Wednesday afternoon on the playing fields of Malet Lambert High School. I dived low to head the winning goal when this greengrocer’s son, Colin Murphy, decided to intervene by kicking my face, which he argued should not be below knee height. He went on to coach Hull City. I grabbed my clothes, did not clean the clotted blood off my face, walked down East Park Avenue and caught the Aldbrough bus home to Sproatley. Still muddy and bloody I walked down Park Road to my house where a bunch of Ladies Bright Hour ladies were sipping tea with my mother. “Tut tut,” they said. A few years later I lined up a shot from just outside the penalty area and blasted the ball goalward. One millisecond after the ball left my foot I felt considerable pain just above and behind my knee. Ah Ha! Hamstring tear I shouted happily, and that is what it was.

As a student, I gravitated for a while to rugby. Being small and nimble I played scrum half, although occasionally moving to fly half. Anyway on this occasion, on about the 25 yard line, I fed the ball into the scrum, which wheeled counterclockwise and let the ball out past the right foot of the Number 8. Here was the opportunity of a lifetime to fake a long pass to the fly half, pull the ball in and break around the blind side. Unfortunately, the opposition blind side wing forward broke early and stuck out his arm, which mimicked a clothes line, and knocked me senseless for a while. On an almost identical occasion some months later the blind side break was rewarded by having most of the scrum collapse on me and making my knee bend and twist and crack – a torn medial meniscus was the diagnosis offered at the Leeds General Infirmary, no plaster needed, just a pressure bandage until the swelling went down, then a crepe bandage for a week or so. I think that is when I graduated to fly half, where one can usually see what is coming.

Now cricket is very much a gentleman’s game that spread with the British Empire to the colonies. These colonies had the audacity to reject British Rule, while retaining our language, democratic government and cricket. Now one day I was fielding at first slip, perhaps a little too close, when an outside edge flashed my way. I was a little too quick grasping at the ball, which proceeded to hit the very tip of my right index finger. “Ouch”, I said as the sad distal interphalangeal joint bent every which way then swelled like a football. Some 60 years later said joint is still swollen and misshapen. My tenure as Physiotherapist to Warwickshire CCC and, on one occasion, the great 1963 West Indies touring side, gave me the opportunity to ply my trade on the field and in my little hut across the way from the main pavilion and changing rooms. I recall reducing a dislocated finger sustained by the courageous captain, Mike Smith, who fielded at short square leg. Another serious injury was to a fast bowler who tore his abdominal muscles – I observed as the surgeon removed a big clot and sewed the two retracted pieces of rectus abdominus together. To his credit, Dave Brown was bowling fast for England the following season. Other injuries were mostly sprains and strains – shoulders, backs, hamstrings, elbows, and mood following a bad day.

Monday, April 15, 1996: The historic **100th running** of the **Boston Marathon** attracted 38,708 entrants (36,748 starters) and had 35,868 official finishers. In the bottom left hand corner of the framed commemorative poster on the study wall there is a color photograph of one swollen, black and blue right ankle. Because of the high demand for pre-race porta potties, I left the line and slotted my way through the crowd to my age group corral. Off went the gun and the flyaways zoomed down the hill from Hopkinton. Half way down the hill I maneuvered to the left hand side of the road and into the woods to take a leak. As I rushed back to the race, anxious not to lose my hard earned pace position, I stepped on a rock and sprained my ankle. “Ouch”, I said. I had no choice but to hobble the next 26 miles, taking more than 4 hours, where my daughter, Ginny, was waiting with the car keys to drive us back to Michigan, which she did, all the way.

These were some of the more memorable and serious injuries. Others, somewhat memorable, but less serious, were the many scraped knees and elbows familiar to habitual runners. Cricket brought its share of thigh bruises. Fortunately my one venture into skydiving, despite a premature release failure and a clear view of big brother driving downwind in his Beetle to witness my arrival, only resulted an ungainly collapse, rather than the rehearsed graceful roll. I guess I got off lightly.

**Chapter 30**

**Jobs**

There are jobs, hard jobs and jobs your father and grandfather used to do.

Jobs are usually things you do for someone else, who in turn rewards you by giving you money, for what the job is worth, the time you spent on the job or a negotiated amount between you and the customer / boss. Sometimes you do jobs out of the goodness of your heart, for charity or just for fun. I guess that I’ve been all over this job map.

As a child, among other duties, I had to tidy up my room, take out the trash, clean the windows, tend to the garden, clean up after the pets, muck out the pig sty and chicken shed and set the table for dinner. For these efforts I was rewarded with weekly pocket money. This amount bore no relationship whatsoever with the amount or quality of my work. Maybe I should have negotiated a piecework system or joined a union or something. This weekly payment increased over the years until I was in my early teens and started working outside the house, usually on a local farm, mucking out the cowsheds, hedging and ditching or helping bring in the harvest. This last activity was potentially lethal. I used a big scythe to “open up” the cornfield so that the reaper could get in. This experience served me well at home where I wielded my own scythe to cut down the nettles between the fruit trees in the orchard and the assorted grasses under the hawthorn hedges before lopping and laying them neatly.

Potato picking was a job for little kids. They didn’t have to bend so far to reach the potatoes after the spinner had dug them up. We little kids put the potatoes into buckets for the strong farm hands to load into a cart to be taken to a big long pile covered with straw until needed. We even had two weeks “potato picking” holiday every October to do this job.

Harvest time jobs in the village were also lucrative – we received an hourly rate, set competitively by the dozen or so local farmers. After the reaper and binder had done their jobs we got to do stooking – picking up sheaves of corn (barley, oats or wheat) and placing them tent like in a stook so that they could dry out. Next we loaded the sheaves on to a rully (cart) to be taken to the stackyard near the farm. We then forked them up to the stack where two people arranged them neatly. Then we waited a few months for the local threshing service came to shake off all the heads of corn and leave the stalks to be stacked into a straw stack until it was used for bedding down the cows in the cow house. It should be mentioned that cows cannot be potty trained. They often made a mess of our football and cricket pitches arguing that the field belonged to them. They poop all over the road as they are herded from the field to the farm yard. And then they poop again in the cow house. This makes more work for farm hands and the casual local teenagers. They shovel the stuff into barrows to be taken out to the manure pile in the farm yard, later to be spread around the fields as fertilizer. The best time of the day were when we got to eat our “luance” (allowance or lunch) in the mid-morning, mid-day or mid-afternoon.

I also used to hang out the washing for my mother. This was a bone of contention as the washing line was next to our garden path which was our cricket pitch and our mother didn’t like to wash the sheets again.

Then we grew up and went to college and got a job sitting in front of a computer all day, perhaps going to the occasional meeting, for the rest of our lives.

It all started at 3.00am this morning when the alarm woke us up to go to Jacksonville for a 6.00 am flight to JFK. Well, actually, it started about a week earlier when we began to pack for our trip to Bangladesh – clothes for a year, books for my job and electronic paraphernalia to connect us to the outside world. I am reminded of that little girl, Lilli from Mira, in the theater show, Carnival, who traveled on two busses and a train:

*I came on two buses and a train
Can you imagine that
Can you imagine that
Two buses and a train*

Russell arrived promptly at 3.30 and packed our four big suitcases, each weighing 28kg into the rear compartment of his minivan. We arranged the four smaller carry-ons around our feet and set off along the scenic Amelia Island route over the bridge to Jacksonville. Russel is chatty, we put the world to rights by suggesting a few adjustments here and there during the 50 minutes to the airport. We loaded the luggage on to a cart and walked the few yards where we dumped it at the check-in. Despite our enthusiastic protestations we could not check the luggage through to Dhaka. We also could not even carry on our carry-ons as there was no space in the overhead compartments; so, we entrusted our precious stuff to the man at the gate in return for little red pick-up tickets, and mentally prepared for the logistic ordeal , with transfers and luggage, at JFK.

At JFK, we had to change from Delta to Saudia airlines, which required us to rent a trolley for $6 and plow our way on trains and through crowded gate areas for about a million miles to terminal 1. Our fellow passengers, mostly loaded up to the gills with big suitcases and some small children, were no match for our 4 x 28 = 112 kg = 2.2 x 112 = about 200 pounds on a cart with wheels and no brakes. Only one broken suitcase wheel and torn zip so far.

Two hours later, at 5.00am we reached the check-in at Terminal 1 for our 6.00am flight where a very cheerful clerk set our minds at rest and passed over the tickets to Dhaka, via Riyadh, along with our luggage claim checks. It was only a brief walk through security to the Al Italia lounge near our gate where a late breakfast / early lunch and choice of TVs awaited us. So I decided to document our latest travels – more in a while.

Moving forward. The trip to Riyadh was long, but we were pampered with reclining seat beds and frequent food. An interesting feature of the reclining seats was that your lower legs could be snapped in half if you weren’t quick enough to lift them above the firm foot rest as the seat reclined; after a brief uncomfortable encounter I learned quickly to push the button on the arm of the seat and simultaneously pull my knees, with feet attached, to my chin. I must have slept well as I hardly noticed passing across half the world.

Riyadh was palatial, until we moved down to the boarding area where crowds jostled for precedence in multiple crooked lines. But, as we were relatively unencumbered, we soon got to the relative tranquility of our business class seats, ready for the relatively brief journey to Dhaka. This is where the fun began. It would be an understatement to say that Dhaka is a busy place, so I would venture the observation that Dhaka is a very busy place, especially on the roads with their mixture of trucks, busses, cars, three wheeled motorized and human powered mini vehicles, and bikes, pedestrians with loads, pigs and ducks. Eventually we arrived at our BRAC hotel with two large suitcases and two carry-ons apiece and a cup of tea in our hotel room which will be our home during our job start and house search.

The jobs sort of started and we are working that out on the fly, or rather on the Internet. Our room at the Bracinn was comfortable and the food in the dining room was very good. Yesterday we moved into or enormous (2500 sq. ft.), enough room to swing a cat! But, and this is a big but, the Corona Virus is deluging the world. Should we stay or should we go; if we decide to go, then where, when and how?

**Chapter 31**

**Plantation Walkie-Talkies**

**Rationale**

Personal health and wellbeing is probably a major concern of most members of our aging community. An apparent omission in the services offered by AIPCA is the minimal attention to health and fitness, other than discussion of golf and a fitness center.

What is better than walking (or running) and talking for the physical, mental and social health of an aging cohort?

What is better than walking / running buddies to get you out of bed in the morning or off the couch in the evening and into the beautiful Amelia Island Plantation environment?

**The Objectives**

The objectives of this proposal – “Plantation Walkie–Talkies” (the title is open for discussion) – include the following:

* Maximize motivation and participation
* Maximize flexibility to accommodate individual capabilities and limitations
* Maximize health and fitness for this cohort
* Maximize the use of available resources – the footpaths and the beach, plus parking if needed
* Maximize the use of available communication media – AIPCA mailing list
* Minimize administration (decentralize)
* Zero budget requirements

**The Development Process**

* Identify convenient gathering points
* Identify routes with distances between 1 and 10 (or more) miles
* Identify convenient times in the morning and evening
* Identify days of the week - every day, three days, one day
* Identify walking / running speeds (30, 20, 15, 10 minutes per mile or somewhere in between)
* Communicate a **selection of combinations** of these times, places , distances and speeds via the AIPCA mailing list
* **Starting with a small group, these processes (sub groups) should be encouraged to grow in scale as the cohort grows in size and variation.**

**The plan**

1. Form a small committee to iron out some details
2. Just do it!

**The result**

It sort of worked for a while, the ads kept flowing in the Plantation Newsletter, but the people either did not start or stopped coming. The faithful few met twice a week for a while, then we left for Bangladesh and I believe the activity folded into just a couple of couples now and then.

**Chapter 32**

**Running Buddies**

Alas alack. Now I run alone

with no copilot, like a drone

But drones have thoughts and feelings too

Happy memories, that run just flew

Up early that's a habit

Which shoes to wear, they do not match

Never mind, it's dark, no one will catch

The sartorial mess of this old rabbit

Back in the day we would run and talk

About this and that and perhaps the other

All would be well until I balk

At that hill, the breath to bother

What do I do to pass the time

Memories appear at every bend

But on the strait it's plans that chime

To other’s ear to lend.

The running buddies deserve some names

Often it was Garry, Mike and Murphy

I recall there was Sam in Singapore

And Vinnie and Don in the rare Prescott air.

For a while there was Veronica and the shoe shop man

Every Saturday around the Space place

We also had an astronaut or two

To keep us on our toes and up to pace

Next came the Amelia Walkie Talkies

A good name and an even better plan

But alas, no more comers, from these aging flunkies

All good things must will end in the can

Now we are in Bangladesh

We know no one and the streets are not fresh

So what should I do but buy a treadmill

And survey the scene over the window sill.

**Chapter 33**

**Education**

I just read the book “Educated” by Tara Westover. It is a riveting memoir about a girl from an oppressive family and no formal schooling growing up, going to college, getting a doctorate and eventually leaving her restrictive home environment. The fact that she succeeded in writing a best selling book despite the lack of traditional early education is a commentary (albeit a single instance) on the relative contributions of the classroom and the individuals themselves. Good students succeed despite their teachers; poor students fail despite their teachers? Education is about learning, sometimes with a little help from teaching.

I have been concerned about these issues for many years. As a schoolboy I observed teachers with widely different approaches and personalities; some I liked and some I didn’t like, some appeared to like me and some didn’t. As a school teacher for a year in an inner city school in Birmingham, England, ironically called “Hope Street”, I observed the behavior and performance of students and teachers from a very depressed neighborhood, now largely demolished. Later (1977), as a professor at the University of Hong Kong, I quickly observed that although the medium for instruction was English, all the students spoke Cantonese with their friends and families, and, during class, with their classmates when I was not watching.

So I developed a “Feedback Classroom” that consisted of a central teacher console and an array of buttons in front of each student - four answer choice buttons and a “send” button. Student responses were stimulated by a multiple choice format question displayed via the overhead projector; it would be easier nowadays to use contemporary computer / wifi based equipment. Questions were inserted at strategic places within the class. The “feedback classroom” technology was based on a concept that I used while learning Morse Code at my training camp in the Royal Air Force. Perhaps the most instructive value of this feedback was the summary that identified how many and which students gave which of the four responses. It was eye-opening to note when half the class got the wrong answer having been given the correct information just a few minutes earlier. Some would argue that these interruptions were disruptive; other’s would argue that they were important in the adaptive behavior of the teacher. Despite this critical analysis, the students generally did well in the exams.

Other ‘operational’ methods that I developed were small group discussions strategically embedded within a class, and group based one page reports after each class. Again, it might be argued that the discussions embedded within the class were disruptive. Usually one or more group representatives were asked to summarize their discussions for the benefit of the whole class and this often generated class wide discussion and debate. The one page reports generated many creative, succinct and informative summaries. Basic requirements of each report were: a title, date, group member names, references and minimum 10 point characters; the rest of the content and format was up to the group members. At the end of the semester each class member and the teacher had a summary of the class content. These reports also helped to generate midterm and final exam questions. The final exam also to the form of a individual “one page reports” for each question.

Why is it then that these educational technologies do not necessarily generate more successful students, who usually grow through prestigious schools and colleges? Is it that these prestigious schools and colleges have more selective intakes? Or is it that good students will learn despite their teachers?

**Chapter 34**

**Jocks**

A few days after my ramblings on fish and chips and the culinary masterpiece of fish patties I feel the urge to move forward two decades from the 40s to the 60s. Again the very soon to be my wife figures prominently in this experience, although this time we were on neutral territory in Loughborough, Leicestershire. Today I recreated Jocks hot dogs. Now the original Jock, a Scotsman, had a hot dog stall down town. This was no ordinary hot dog stall, it was the world’s greatest hot dog stall, second only to the Sproatley fish and chip shop. Jock bought in his bread rolls from a local baker, his shredded pork from a local butcher, his onions from a local green grocer and his HP sauce from the local supermarket. But it was the way he put them together that made his stall the greatest, especially on Saturday nights after football and a few beers in the Blackbird. It was possible to walk, drive or ride your bike from the campus to downtown, but a leisurely stroll after closing time was often in order. The mention of the name Jocks was enough to make even the hardiest student with homework still to do start to salivate. Yea or nay, Jock would ask, meaning do you or do you not want HP sauce on your hot dog. Invariably the answer was yea, but that didn't stop him asking, just in case.

Many have wondered and many still wonder what sausages are made of. They come in all shapes and sizes and nationalities; the Germans are famous for their brocks and brats, the English prefer pork, but sometimes beef or chicken. Traditionally the basic ingredients are minced pork meat and fat, with a few spices thrown in here and there. The malicious rumor that they mostly contain offal is unsubstantiated, at least by 3 Wikipedia authorities. I now require students to submit three on line references to substantiate a statement. The skin is not synthetic and adds to the experience, especially when well cooked. When I was a little boy I helped my mother make sausages. My job was to turn the handle on the mincing machine and not to poke the meat down with my fingers. Thus I got fIrst-hand knowledge of ingredients, manufacturing processes, cooking and eating. I recall that on occasion onion, peas or bread used to find their way into the mix.

Sausages may be eaten at any mealtime, sometimes hot, sometimes cold. Breakfast is a traditional time for the sausage to parade with bacon, eggs, baked beans and tomatoes. At lunch they should be eaten with chips, whereas at dinner the general rule is to have them with mashed potatoes, peas and gravy. Always add HP sauce.

In Singapore we can buy ground pork very inexpensively from the NTUC Fair Price supermarket. It has a healthy speckled look when uncooked but turns to a more homogeneous greyish brown under the influence of heat. My approach is to peel and chop plenty of onions to mix with the pork. I would say two to one in raw volume. I might add a bread crust or two and certainly peas if available. Thaw the meat, mix in the other stuff and add sage or rosemary; then, and this is the secret, add a couple of chopped up red peppers. Don't forget to rinse your hands after handling the peppers, because if you inadvertently rub your eyes with peppery hands you will know about it! After mixing well we come to the artistic stage. Sprinkle flour liberally on the chopping board, take a dollop of mixture, roll it into a ball and then around the flour. With a flourish you should pound the ball flat with the side of your fist and then rotate the one inch thick cylinder of sausage mix clockwise and counter clockwise on both sides. Half a pound of sausage mix makes about ten of the little beauties.

These sausage patties go well with potatoes, rice or spaghetti. Your choice. A quicker way is to throw all the meat mix into the frying pan and cook and stir until done. Then split a bread bun or roll, add the cooked sausage and lather with HP sauce. Eat from the end, not the middle. If you have company then you should go the pasta, rice or potato route and use a knife and fork or chopsticks. Presentation is key. One should have a triangle of patties, potatoes (mashed) and peas and eat clockwise. The health concious should put a blob of butter on the mashed potatoes. With spaghetti you should add spaghetti sauce out of one of those jars and with rice you should revert to the triangle, but substitute baked beans for the peas. Always add HP sauce. Support the occasion with Guinness.

Now we come to the sad part. Whereas mother was a big fan of Jocks hot dogs back in the day, she will not touch my creations with a proverbial barge pole. I wonder why.

**Chapter 35**

**Lakes**

When I was a little boy there were a lot of bombs dropping in the fields around our house. They made big holes in the ground which rapidly filled with water and spawned frog spawn which turned into noisy frogs. One day as I was walking my border collie, Mac, I strayed over to and , by mistake, fell into a pond. I still recall the soggy walk along Park Road to Mill House, where my mother was not amused. Now big ponds are called lakes and down our road and through some woods there was, and still is, the beautiful Burton Constable Lake where, when I was a teenager, we fished for roach, perch, pike and sometimes tench from a punt. Guess what, one day I fell out of the punt. There were nice swans on this lake.

Food was in short supply in those days so we kept chickens, pigs, rabbits and ducks in our back yard. Now as ducks like to swim I dug a pond in our orchard with an island in the middle. The ducks usually swam around this pond in a clockwise direction, I wonder why? Perhaps it is something to do with the moon. Duck eggs are bigger than chicken eggs, but that didn’t matter, because in those days I didn’t like eggs. We also kept some geese for a couple of years, geese are very noisy. There were a few swans on Burton Constable lake.

When I was eleven, I started going to Malet Lambert High School. This involved catching either the ten to eight or half past eight bus into town, Hull. I got off the bus on Holderness Road and kicked a tennis ball along East Park Avenue to East Park. In the park was a big lake with swans and a bridge. I was still a bad eater so every Thursday I ran around the lake to 55 Rye Hill Grove where Auntie Edie made chips for lunch. On Mondays I went across the Bridge to Auntie Doris’s with my packed lunch. On Wednesdays I went across the park to the Fish and Chip Shop and on Fridays I got a ride to my friend David’s house where Auntie Muriel made chips. Over the years I got to know the East Park lake pretty well. We ran around the lake for our cross country races and walked around it after Sunday School at East Park Baptist Church. I don’t recall ever falling into this lake, although, from time to time we rented canoes and clowned around a lot.

I joined the University of Oklahoma in 1981 and we lived in a beautiful house along Whispering Pines in Norman. I used to run with a couple of meteorology professors out to Lake Thunderbird along a long dirt road. That was a very big lake. However, we moved to Michigan in 1986 where there are a bunch of even bigger lakes, called “The Great Lakes”. As our house was (is) situated on twelve acres of wood land with a wimpy little stream, we decided to dig some ponds. Or rather we hired a guy with a big digger to dig three ponds. Two of the ponds have year round water and ducks, but the other one is dry most of the time, and has a lot of trees. Many years later when I worked for NASA (2000 to 2004), I bought a house on Nassau lake and a canoe. My cross training involved alternating running and canoeing around the lake. This was good for my marathon efforts – 15 marathons in 15 months in 15 states. There were nice swans on this lake.

Nowadays I live on Amelia Island, along Wood Duck Road. Across the road and along the path there is a lake where people like to fish. I don’t think that there are and swans on this lake. But lakes are lakes, they try their best to be both attractive and useful.

**Chapter 36**

**Limits**

The other day I drove around the Amelia Island plantation; I came across many speed limits – 5, 10, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45; all in a few square miles. In addition there were speed warnings, on yellow signs, for sharp bends – 25 and 35; some of these were placed very close to other contradicting speed limits. Now speed limits are hard numbers and are mandatory, you get a ticket if you break the law. But the law and their local enforcement agents may exercise some judgement – they may allow five or so miles over the limit, depending on their mood. One reason for this leniency is that drivers are generally unable to be precise about their speed and they like to get a little extra without being caught and the powers that be don’t want to argue marginal cases in court. Also speed checking technology may show some (user and usage based) error. Age limits for driving (upper and lower) vary between countries is also a very subjective issue. The eight ages of carman sums this up – teens – Wheels, 20s - speed, 30s - space (for family), 40s – style, 50s – prestige, 60s – safety, 70s – wheels, 80s - pull the keys (but not mine).

This variability in human behavior and performance is described statistically by other limits – confidence limits. If we make repeated observations of a (somewhat) random variable, like speed, we can represent the observations by a Gaussian or Normal distribution, we can estimate that 68.26%, 95.44% or 99.74% of the observations will lie within one or two or three standard deviations of the estimated average value. This statistical gobbledygook, lies between the driver, the traffic cop and the courts – they all add a little leeway, depending on their mood.

There are other kinds of limits – called records. A lot of (young) people can run a mile in less than 15 minutes, some can even walk the distance in that time. But only a handful of superstars have run a mile in less than four minutes. The same can be said about climbing mountains, cut price supermarket items and the cost of a car. These observations may be modeled by the Log Normal, Gumbel, Weibull or Extreme Value distributions, which, used judiciously, may give a fairly good fit to skewed data. These “limits” go off to infinity so we have to impose our own confidence levels when we say that the three minute mile is impossible. Another thing about these athletic limits is that they vary with age. In most events one peaks in one’s twenties or thirties, but it’s downhill (or uphill depending on you metaphor) all the way from then.

In the nefarious worlds of drinking and gambling (it is dangerous to mix the two) it is common to set limits. 0.05 percent blood alcohol or 10 cents (dollars?) a bet could be suggested. But, if you are not driving or have inside information about the form of a particular horse and rider, then you may, from time to time, be tempted to adjust these limits. The same may be said for dabbling in the stock market or packing stuff for a vacation. These kind of limits are set subjectively, but may be imposed externally or even objectively.

Writing stories, is, for all intents and purposes, limitless. Except, that is, for people with limited interest, imagination, time or incentive. When writing stories one is advised to “not let the truth get in the way of a good story”. In the words of the bard, “the sky’s the limit”, but where is the sky?

**Chapter 37**

**October**

October was a busy month on the roads

It all started on October 5 in Detroit. The 15th running of the Detroit Free Press Marathon started outside the new baseball stadium, over the bridge, along the Canadian side of the Detroit River, back under the tunnel, around the scenic Belle Isle and back to finish on the 30 yard line of Ford Field. The good news was that it was my daughter Caroline’s first marathon, which she completed in 4.02. The bad news is that she left her aging dad at mile 18. He walked a bit and ran a bit with his 74 year old running buddy to finish in 4.10 – 18th in the 60 – 64 group. Young Tommy of the Gordon Bennett Band ran his sixth marathon in yet another PR of 4.20 – still without training.

Back the next weekend to the hot and humid Houston for the Wiki Wiki run – a slightly short 5k around the Friendswood neighborhoods – with a first place 55-64 age group finish in 20.40. The following day was the Webster Bicycle “New Du” – 2 mile run. 11 mile bike – 2 mile run, again with an age group first. Runners may run faster than bikers run but bikers bike much faster than runners bike! I think?

The following weekend was the eagerly awaited and much heralded 20k, downtown. A well organized and supported event up and down the parkway. Interesting backchat with another “grey-hair” as we jostled for position. A respectable 9th place finish in 1:40. The month concluded with the grand Marine Corps Marathon in Washington DC. Close to 20,000 runners and great deals at the expo. I had a chat and photograph with Khalid Khannouchi of 2.05 fame. I joined Jeff Galloway with the 3.40 crowd to try out the run walk theory, but they left me at mile 12 along the scenic Rock Creek parkway. Still on a good pace until mile 20 when I came face to face with age, senility and “never again”. Struggled back to Iwo Jima in 4.01 to regain the family bragging rights. 22/ 193 in the age group and about 3,000 / 18,000 overall. It took a taxi, shuttle bus, two metro trains, a train, shuttle bus, plane, shuttle bus and my pick up to get me from the race to my home in Nassau Bay on Sunday night. The big family show down will be at Houston in January – the pain passes and at this age memory is short. November will be a rest month - in DC again and then New Zealand. Party at my house on the Friday after Thanksgiving. RSVP

**Chapter 38**

**Passwords**

I have over 150 passwords, some of which are duplicates, some invented by someone else and the rest based on some, familiar to me, theme, with sneaky little variations to discourage the bad guys. I meticulously mix upper(26) and lower(26) case, digits (10) and symbols (30) – about 100 choices for each character. If we have, say, a 10 character password, we have an awful lot of combinations for our different sites. If we use two or more factor authentication we have even more choices. Sometimes we may use more or less than ten characters. However, as we find it difficult to remember precisely ten random characters, we use a variety of methods and combinations for our different passwords, or use one password for everything. Of course the problem with this latter approach is that, once the intruder catches one, he (or she) catches all. To aid our memory we use familiar characters and sequences, perhaps with a few personal variations on the theme. We also, if we aren’t lazy, change our passwords frequently. But, unlike the amateur thief, the professional bad guys have computers, which think and explore real fast.

Nothing is water tight. But we can but try. We can use the ages of our children or the neighbor’s children or our friends or some TV personalities, or variations of the thousands of sports statistics readily available on the back pages; we may also use the stock market numbers or some other external theme. Alternatively, we may try various official reference numbers we have been given, with appropriate juggling or other mixing process to baffle the spies. Poor spellers can use their lack of talent to fool their more literate or numerate foes. How do you spell “Skool” or “antidisestablishmentarianism” or when did William the Conqueror conquer? Despite our efforts, the heinous hacker will, like Peter Rabbit, sneak under the gate. Nothing is air tight.

Another problem occurs when some services require you to put your passwords into their computers, which may pave the way for the sneaky snatchers of people’s privacy.

Going back to my particular challenge, >150 passwords, what should I do to avoid the cryptic warning - “Wrong user name or password”, sometimes followed by “One more failure and your computer will not be accessible for three months or your birthday whichever comes sooner.” What should I do to avoid confusion among different themes and combinations? We could write them down or stick them in a computer file, but then again the hard copy may be lost or the computer file exposed. We could use face or fingerprint recognition, But my computer only recognizes me half the time, depending on smile or no smile, beard or no beard, finger or thumb.

**Chapter 39**

**Pets**

Over the years we have gained and lost lots of pets. My first recollection was a black cat in Sproatley during the war; it used to come with us into the air raid shelter when the sirens blared. Shortly after the war my dad took me on the bus to a farmhouse in a nearby village – Flinton – where a border collie had just had a litter. We caught the next bus home carrying the cuddly little thing. We had a kennel in the small back garden next to our house, which also led to the attached coal house, earth toilet, rabbit hutches and appropriately placed lavender tree, We had moved the air raid shelter, which was made from an old petrol tank covered in earth, into the orchard, next to the chicken sheds, to serve as a pig sty. Now we need a pet census – one border collie dog, two pigs, a dozen chickens, a bunch of ducks, a couple of geese, four rabbits and a tortoiseshell cat, I believe that my uncle Walter took the black cat when he and his family moved out of Mill House into East Hull. These pets all had a limited life, some lucky enough to die of old age. We ate one of the pigs, a few chickens and some rabbits, an d once a great big goose. My dog, Mac, used to herd the cattle in the nearby fields but one day he got his head stamped on by a cart horse and had to be put down. These early experiences of mortality, amplified by the demise of grandparents are important life lessons for a growing child.

Moving on a few years we thought that it would be good for our children to have pets. We had a very large fish tank in our 5th floor flat in Hong Kong in the late 1970s. It sprung a leak which required me to rescue the fish into a much smaller tank and appease the down stairs neighbors by ladling out the water. It had been a beautiful umpteen gallon tank with all sorts of tropical fish and ornaments. We also had a budgie in a cage but our maid, Rose, from the Philippines, let it out while the balcony doors were open. So the bird flew out and Rose flew down the stairs and caught the bird in the garden in front of Fulham Gardens near Pokfulam Road. I believe we donated the fish and the bird to friends when we left Hong Kong in 1979. Lily’s new daughter is called Rosie, she is a pet!!

We didn’t have pets in Australia and Nova Scotia but by the time Oklahoma came along we were pet starved, so we bought a Labrador for Tommy. Unfortunately, Cadbury, it was a chocolate lab, didn’t last long. I recall he had epilepsy or something similar. Moving to 15 acres in Michigan set us on the search for more dogs and cats. The cats were like barnyard cats, they ate the local mice and came home at supper time. The dog, Gloopy was something more. He was named Gloopy following a question to our exchange student, Olga, who translated ‘stupid’ into Russian. One day Gloopy chased a car on Silverbell Road and caught it. Big mistake, cars are bigger than dogs and they fight back with their tires. Gloopy was never the same again so I took him down to Houston with me in 2000. We ambled around the golf course, behind my house in Nassau Bay, most days until, one day, he just rolled over. I buried him in the back yard. Sometime after I left NASA and sold the house, there was a big typhoon which flooded the whole area – four feet deep around my house. Perhaps Gloopy turned in his grave.

So much for pets, they come and go, but while we have them they are wonderful. RIP

**Chapter 40**

**Piano**

The Sproatley Methodist Chapel sported two pianos, one in the main hall and the other in the Sunday School room at the back. The Sunday evening service, at 6.30 pm, was usually conducted by a lay preacher, who rode in from the City of Kingston upon Hull, some five or six miles away. Once a month we had the pleasure of a visit by an ordained minister who presided over a few local village Methodist Churches. He would arrive on the East Yorkshire bus around 4.30 and come to our house for a Sunday tea of cucumber sandwiches and jam tarts. The congregation was sparse – my mam and dad and me, Mrs. Barker, Mr. and Mrs. Beadle and their children, Mr. and Mrs. Sawyer and their daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Hunter, who had to walk about a mile to the village. Mrs. Barker, Mrs. Beadle and my mother took turns playing the piano for the service.

We had a piano at home on which my mother and brother played frequently and my father poked occasionally; my brother’s rendering of “In the mood” was quite accomplished. I was sent to Miss Claire, who lived in a bungalow half way up the hill, to start piano lessons when I was about seven. After the second lesson Miss Claire returned my sixpence along with a note to my mother reporting that I had no talent or work ethic – I had struggled with my scales during the week. And that was the end of my musical career, although we did have a piano and an organ in our house. We also purchased a piano in Oklahoma. Two of our children, through some genetic quirk, became accomplished musicians. Caroline majored in musical theater at the University of Michigan and Tommy plays his guitar regularly for a living in the Los Angeles area.

We had two music lessons a week at Malet Lambert High School where the perceptive Ding Dong Bell assigned us to different categories according to his judgement of singing talent. There were “A’s”, “B’s” and “Grunters”. Guess what I was! However by the time we reached the small sixth form, the school choir, like the school football and cricket teams, and the thespian crowd, had to be manned; so I got to join the choir for the bi annual performances. During these years we got to go to the Astoria Cinema on Friday nights where a brightly lit organ rose from a pit during the intermission and we all got to sing “Heart of my Heart” (I love that melody.)

Back in the day, many families had pianos in their parlors. However, lots of these space consuming pieces of furniture met the sad fate of bonfire fodder and demolition competitions. Sad. We don’t have a piano now, perhaps we should buy one and I could resume my musical ambitions; perhaps I should take lessons! Or not!?

**Chapter 41**

**Pie**

Most people will think first about apple pie. That is understandable because apple pie tastes great and is probably the most familiar kind of pie. Sometimes apple pie has thick crusts which is OK if you eat it with a slab of cheese, but when mixed with custard the crust becomes less than crusty, more like a soggy mess. We used to have apple pie every third Sunday for pudding (desert) after a grand dinner of beef or lamb, but not often pork, with roast potatoes, peas, carrots and Yorkshire pudding with gravy. The other Sunday pies had bramble, rhubarb, gooseberry or raspberry fillings. Sometimes we were allowed to save the Yorkshire pudding for pudding with treacle or butter and sugar. No wonder I have a sweet tooth!

But there’s more to pie than meets the eye. For example you can have custard pie or cream pie which are both good for throwing at other people’s faces if you are in a slap stick comedy show. Why does the audience laugh at this unkind action? Not only does the recipient have to wash his or her face afterwards, he or she has to wash their clothes and clean up the mess from the floor unless other people can be paid or otherwise engaged to clean up the mess.

Some pies have savory fillings like chicken, steak and kidneys, pork or sweet potatoes. We used to get pork pies around Christmas time, they are pretty good, hot or cold. Another favorite Christmas pie delicacy are mince pies which have mincemeat as a filling. Mincemeat, contrary to expectations is not made out of meat, rather in is a mixture of sultanas, raisins, sugar, ginger, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg and butter or suet. Wikipedia advises one to eat mince pies, which may be large or small, with vanilla ice-cream; I prefer them with custard, made from Birds custard powder and milk. Note that while making the custard in a pan on the cooktop you must be constantly vigilant and stirring so as a. not to burn the custard or b. not to have it boil over and make a mess.

Pie sounds like PI, which is a strange number you can take all day calculating by dividing 22 by 7.; get a big piece of paper and try it. It is sometimes used to work out how big circles are, but mostly used to torture early teenagers in their trigonometry classes along with e and i. An alternative version of the beggar’s litany was “From Pi, e and i , Good Lord deliver us.” You have to come from Hull to understand that reference – “From ‘ull, ‘ell and ‘alifax, Good Lord Deliver us” referred to the times when beggars were not allowed in these city limits. One other trick with Pi, is to draw a short horizontal line between the bottom ends of its legs and another half way up and as long as the top line and finally a short vertical line between the end of the top line and the long horizontal line you just drew. You end up with JBP, that’s me!

Don McLean immortalized American Pie with the song:

 “Bye, bye Miss American pie

Drove my Chevy to the levee, but the levee was dry

And them good old boys drinking whiskey and rye

Singing this’ll be the day that I die…”

**Chapter42**

**Running**

This morning I went to the gym in our condo complex because it was cold and raining outside. Back in the day, the weather didn’t bother me, not even in Michigan, but, as I said, that was “back in the day.” Treadmill running is fun, you can vary the regimes, crank up the slope and speed, all the while watching the television with a bunch of experts pontificating on why the President should or should not be impeached. The air waves have been saturated with this topic for months. Its not that Democracy is a bad idea, it’s probably the best form of government, rather its that the players in this game play hard and long, bending every rule as they go. Some abuse their senior positions to create a *de facto* dictatorship.

Back to running. I have run most of my life. Initially there was usually a ball involved, but later just me, with or without running buddies. There’s more on these folk in a chapter in my book on “Running”. Anyway, since I wrote the book I have discovered the beach on Amelia Island. Here one can watch the waves or the footprints in the sand: some of the strides are long some are short, some footprints are large and some are small, some toes point forward while others point at ten to two, some have shoes with different patterns and others are unshod. Today I inspected my gait in the mirror as I ran on the treadmill. I was happy to note that my toes were pointing forward and that I had no pain in my knees or hips or wherever. This can be a problem when running with running buddies, there’s nothing else to talk about.

Technically running is differentiated from walking by stride length or whether one or both or neither feet are touching the ground at the same time. Shuffling and plodding on the other hand have one or both feet on or scraping the floor all the time. One implication of this gait is that it conserves energy by reducing the gravity imparted vertical motion of the body. I have a running buddy called Dan, he is undoubtedly a shuffler, has been ever since I have known him. He doesn’t have bad knees; he still runs ultramarathons.

When I was a teenager, I left home at 8.25 a.m. to walk for three minutes along Park Road to the bus stop by the petrol pumps at the bottom of the hill. When I reached the village green, I would glance to see if the bus was coming down the hill. If so I would have to run. The drivers and conductors were regulars and would generally wait if my timing was not right. Coming back from the city in the evening we sometimes had to run after the departing bus and jump onto the running board if we were late. We thought this was fun, although the conductor was less than happy at these antics.

Between those times and nowadays I have run many training runs and races- see “Running”.

**Chapter 43**

**Snowballs**

This morning the visitors got up in dribs and drabs, helped with the jigsaw, drank their coffee, minded their own business and threw snowballs around the house. They were not actual snowballs, rather they were soft fluffy things, snowball size and ideal for indoor amusement. They were introduced to the attendant company by Auntie Kathleen, mother of six, from Fleetwood and, like me, quite ancient. Every now and then a fight erupted, generally started sneakily by Felicity, daughter of Jenny who comes from Buckingham Palace.

My introduction to snowballs was in February 1947, when I was nine, because my mother was sick. It was the year of the big snow, with drifts way above my head. I was dispatched to live with my grandparents in the nearby village of Skirlaugh for a couple of weeks. There were two traumatic events that occurred during this stay, both associated with snowballs. The first occurred when my grandfather, a veteran of South Atlantic whaling who jumped ship to fight in the Boer War, took me to a local sledding hill to play with local kids. So, being boys, we associated snow fights with play and grandfathers as players. I caught my grandfather on the side of his head and broke his glasses; a further analysis of the missile suggested that the “snowball” was mostly ice.

The second misdemeanor occurred at the local school where I was sent so that I wouldn’t get behind with my studies. I was escorted there by the butcher’s daughter, Maureen Robinson, who, a couple of years later, attended Malet Lambert with me. Maureen was a temptress, she encouraged me to throw snowballs at the icicles hanging in the eves of the school house. I had a good arm and was working my way along the row of icicles when the headmaster came out with his camera for a photo-op. He was not amused when the photo-op was half demolished.

**Chapter 44**

**Sproatley**

Sproatley is a little village in East Yorkshire, some 8 miles to the East of Hull city center. I lived there from 1939 to 1956 when I joined the Royal Air Force for my two years National Service. My mother continued living in Mill House down Park Road until about 1970, when we bought her a bungalow round the corner that was much more manageable than the old Mill House. During that period the population of Sproatley was about 193 souls (I could name them all), although since that time the village has grown to about 1500 with new housing developments springing up in the fields around our house, such as Bandy and 15 Acre. An earlier development of about 10 council houses shortly after the war was also met with some regret although my Auntie Nellie and her big family moved into one of them, as did my friend Johnny Garthwaite. This growth in the number of villagers who worked in the city and not on the farms, has changed the nature of the place. At least the Peacock intruders, used an existing house – I believe it was built by the Rank family in the early 1800s.

Most of the houses were part of the Burton Constable estate; we paid about 3 pounds a year when we arrived and I recall my parent’s horror when the annual rent went up to 12 pounds a year after the war. The village sported seven or eight farm houses, ranging from 50 to 300 acres – Beadle’s, Strong’s, Tommy Taylor’s, Refolds, Rawson’s, Caley’s. Down Park Road were the New Lodge and Old Lodge – gateways to the manor house. The service organizations included Mr. and Mrs. Lound, the grocers and Post Office, Mr. and Mrs. Ball, the bakers, a Police Station, a Fish and Chip shop (Mrs. Barker), A butcher (Mr. Fell), a mobile hardware store (Mr. Beadle), a plumber cum electrician (Mr. Peers), a carpenter cum undertaker (Mr. Harrison). The Sproatley Endowed School was / is up church lane next to the old (circa 1200 AD) church – St. Swithen’s. The Methodist chapel was next door but one the “bottom pub” – the “top pub (The Blue Bell Inn” is up the hill opposite Tradesman’s Row. Another row of cottages, Cockpit row actually did have a place for cockfights. Across the road from Cockpit row was the war memorial and the Village Institute.

In the center of the village is the a large Chestnut tree on the village green at the junction of Park Road and Hull Road, surrounded by the chapel, the bottom pub (the Constable Arms), the bakers, the fish and chip shop, the carpenters, the grocers and the telephone box.

Various farmers let the village boys use their meadows for football (Mr. Strong) and cricket ( Mr. Beadle). Other recreational activities took place in the village institute – table tennis, a mobile cinema on Fridays, a dance once a month, the Women’s Institute once a month and weddings every now and again. In the back room there was a full size billiards and snooker table – lots of fun when we were old enough to know how not to rip the cloth with our jump shots! Sometimes we had jumble sales but there was not the volume of items that there is in modern garage sales and Goodwill stores.

Most of the villagers had big gardens and orchards, and many kept pigs and chickens. The cockerels woke us up every morning and the pigs made a din loud enough to wake the dead as they were driven up the road to Mr. Fell’s.

**Chapter 45**

**Teaching**

Over the years I’ve taught classes of two or three, ten to thirty or one to three hundred (275 actually for engineering statistics). This begs the question of effectiveness and efficiency, enjoyment and ease of management. These classes were with a center city school (Hope Street) in Balsall Heath, Birmingham. The college classes were undergraduates and graduate students in Hong Kong, Nova Scotia (Dalhousie), the USA (Oklahoma and Embry Riddle) and Singapore (NUS and SUSS), with a sabbatical in Melbourne. Some classes were in the morning, some after lunch and some in the evening; these latter students had usually worked all day. The trick of course is to keep the students interested by intrinsic content, participation, familiar applications or context or, perhaps, the threat of exams.

Over the years I have become more and more convinced that education is about learning and that “teaching” is at best a carrot or stimulus, at worst a stick or simply ineffective. Current theories on pedagogy suggest that “student centered” participatory methods are more effective than “teacher centered methods”.

Back to the big third year engineering statistics class. One challenge was that engineers are a very heterogeneous bunch. First you have the Industrials, who are into variability and optimization, then you have the Electricals, who are the best at mathematics, the Mechanicals who are more deterministic and don’t like probability (if in doubt, build it stout using something you know about), the Civils, who have to contend with contextual variability like earth, wind and fire, and finally the Chemicals whose livelihood depends on interactions. Please forgive me if I have erred or exaggerated in my simplistic characterization of these groups, a good story needs a bit of controversy. Anyway you will see that this large heterogeneous group came with different backgrounds and expectations.

A single statistics course needs probability, experimental design and analysis. Probability tells you that you will be wrong some of the time, experimental design expects you to figure out what are the main sources of variation ahead of time and analysis allows you to find the big effects, their interactions and those pesky little residual effects that will surely trip you up.

Moving on to ergonomics foundations for Industrial Engineers. Whereas their Statistics and OR classes are a breeze for the mathematically inclined, and the manufacturing processes classes are “real engineering.” Learning about human sciences (anatomy, physiology, pathology, psychology, and sociology, all with a big dose of Statistics, requires a different mind-set. The bottom line is that the students must understand, the automation utopia aside, that all processes involve technology (hardware and software), people, environmental context and time. The technology can be designed and refined, the people can maybe be selected, trained and motivated, the environment / context usually cannot be changed but sometimes must be controlled, and time is an ever present challenge that interacts with all of the above.

So how should we manage the transition between school and work? One view is that undergraduate is about growing up, while in graduate school you learn a trade. When you get into the outside world, the conditions change – it’s real. You have a purpose(s) and a boss! You learn the difference between right and wrong. You succeed, not necessarily for intrinsic reasons, or you start padding your resume. If all else fails you become a teacher. Oops sorry, teaching is a noble profession, with many well trained, motivated and relatively underpaid people. Socrates had small classes and asked lots of questions and Moses used a stone tablet.

**Chapter 46**

**The Trip of a Lifetime**

For my 80th birthday, Eileen booked a trip to the old country lasting 18 days. She then left me to fill in the details which reminded me, I’m not sure why, of the story of the tiger hunt, but it’s a good story anyway:

*Three employees of a large university (which shall remain nameless to protect the guilty) decided to go on a tiger hunt in India – an engineer, a geographer and a dean from a business school. When they arrived at the edge of tiger country they pitched their tent, lit a camp fire, cooked their veggie burgers and began their preparations for the “trip of a lifetime”. The engineer got out the guns, cleaned them, checked the mechanisms and sorted the ammunition. The geographer got out his maps, GPS equipment and checked the weather forecast – a heatwave for the duration of the trip. Meanwhile the business school dean went for a walk in the forest. After a few minutes she came running back hotly pursued by a tiger, in one end of the tent and out the other, yelling “here’s the first one, you skin it while I go and fetch another.”*

Back to the birthday “trip of a lifetime”. It was suggested that we visit as many friends and relatives as possible while minimizing travel distances and times, and staying a full day at each stop – long enough to catch up on the comings and goings of the last umpteen years and short enough not to be a burden. So we pondered the appropriate technology. Should we drive a car with that new-fangled driverless feature, should we go by bike, should we rent a little airplane and fly, travel by bus or take the train? Eventually, sanity prevailed. Self-drive cars will take a generation before they are safe as they will have to interact with the idiosyncrasies of other cars driven by teenagers and octogenarians. Bikes would over stress our saddle interfaces, and anyway two wheels were never a good idea to start with. (Note that nephew David has just ridden his bike from Fleetwood to the Chinese border, no mean feat, I think he has turned around now). Eileen refused to have me fly, recalling one (just one out of a few hundred) hard landing on my first solo cross country from Prescott to Payson, Az. You should note that the name of the restaurant at the Payson airport where I consoled myself with a cup of coffee waiting for the Embry Riddle accident analysis and recovery team, is “Crosswinds”, enough said! Buses would have to compete with traffic; so train it was, perhaps the best decision for this “trip of a lifetime,” despite the local criticism of the reliability of the services and the need to rely on the generosity of our hosts to manage the last (and first) mile of every trip.

So we made a list, cutting out the more distant of Britain’s appendages – the South West, the Lake District and Scotland. This sequence was due to time and distance optimization plus constraints from preexisting commitments of our various friends and relatives. This then was the people and place sequence: Eurwen and Ken Booth in Aberystwyth, Roy and Kathy Lowe in Birmingham, niece Mary and Steve in Thornton le Dale, near York, cousin Joan and Alan and their daughter Mandy in Sproatley, Eileen’s sister Kathleen in Fleetwood, Roy and Irene Jones in Loughborough, David Carmichael in Cambridge, nieces Jenny and Julie in Swanley, Barrie Wigg in Lewisham, brother Doug and Helen in Abingdon, with a surprise trip to Wimbledon and back to Jenny’s before returning to Heathrow.

This account of “the trip of a lifetime” is being written back in our home in Rochester, Michigan, while babysitting grand-daughter Ginger, aged 2. Now Ginger is what is commonly called “a runner”, if you blink, she’s gone. She knows how to open doors and considers anywhere within or beyond sight her territory. On a walk up the lane this morning to visit our neighbor, Steve, she disappeared into gardens, paths through the vacant lots and the long grass; shrubs and trees in between. She also gave Eileen the run around our garden and woods yesterday, but turned up in her bedroom reading a book, pretty good for a two year old. She now has a baby sister, Rose. Rose is her middle name, her first being Caroline. She will, like me, be pestered frequently and forever by forms that ask for First Name, MI, Last Name.

Now, as mentioned earlier, the author of this “trip of a lifetime” account is now 80 and sometimes forgets details. So yesterday I sent a note to all the participants asking for reminders and suggestions. Sort of crowd sourcing to use the contemporary jargon. Niece Jenny, suggested that these multiple inputs and the final document should adhere to the mantra “don’t let the truth spoil a good story”. So here goes. The account is intended to stretch the imagination, so dwell a while here and there and use your mind’s eye. Please excuse the occasional detour and tautology in this somewhat “random walk.” Some would unkindly call it senile rambling.

The Lyft driver to the Detroit airport, from Lily’s house in Grosse Pointe Woods where we had stayed the night, was half way through a long day. This driving occupation appears to be somewhat attractive, but during the evening hours the driver has to contend with customers who are less than pleasant and sober. In fact the driver confided that some may be quite hostile. Perhaps the Second Amendment should apply to ride share with a guard riding shotgun. Now there’s a thought. On the occasion in question however the journey went well; the driver was chatty, we covered a lot of ground from the state of the union to the state of the weather, with the odd detour around traffic and Trump. An hour and a bit later we found ourselves in the Delta Club where the lunches are always good.

The first leg of the flight was to Boston and I sat next to a man traveling with his extended family to a holiday in Ireland and Scotland. He was a nonstop talker on seemingly random topics with occasional advice from the in-laws sitting around us, who were ardent Trump supporters. We addressed government, football, grandchildren and travel and their many ramifications, with frequently interjected Trumpist views. When I was a little boy we used to sing “Rule Britannia…….Britain never, never, never shall be slaves!” That is until the EU tried to assimilate our little island on the basis of regional economic (and social?) harmony. Perhaps Brexit will succeed, or not. I ran a 10k race yesterday and my number was 1066! The journey, in the middle seat, passed like a flash.

The next leg - Boston to Heathrow - in another middle seat emphasized the utility of movies to pass the time. One was pretty exciting, but weird, about a ballet dancer turned spy, a bit gory. I’ve read quite a few Wallender books recently and they too can be quite gory, but he tells a very good tale. Today I finished a book by Reginald Hill about Dalzeil and Pascoe whose tales have been televised. The book is full of obscure words and Yorkshire slang which bring back happy memories - “Eat all, sup all, pay nowt, see all, ‘ear all, say nowt, and if thee ever wants owt doin’ for nowt, do it for thi sen” The chicken curry dinner was a pleasant treat, curry is a wonderful invention, from India I believe, although now universal; it masks all other flavors and textures; presently Eileen is out there (in India) advising on Business School accreditation and strategy while I am cooking and gardening and trying to finish this historical masterpiece. Meanwhile the Indian cricket team, one outstanding outcome of the empire, are getting whitewashed over in England. You should note that the English taught the Americans language and look what a mess they made of that; they also taught them government, another disaster, but the worst failure was cricket which they turned into baseball - a bit like the rounders game we learned in primary school.

All went well until the dreaded immigration - UK citizens to the right and aliens (that’s us now) to the left. Guess which had the long queue. We were tempted to use our UK passports, but that would have raised too many red flags, especially on our return journey, despite our US citizenship for many years; I know this from experience. These immigration people must be trained on “how to win friends and influence people”. They asked us all sorts of questions like did you enjoy your breakfast and which football team do you support, all the while searching for a misstep. Eventually I must have convinced them that I was an upstanding citizen, ready and keen to spend US dollars to support the British economy. Then came the baggage check for drugs, guns and cigarettes, which we passed like a breeze. I restrained the temptation to make dumb jokes. The only oddities in our baggage were a dozen (empty) conch shells intended as mementos for our hosts. It should be noted that a recent penalty for a woman who took live conch shells from a Florida beach was 15 days in jail! And then the long walk to the bus station began. I said bus station because at the last minute we were advised by niece Julie that the ride in and out of London to get to Reading on trains was a no - no. So bus it was and we just made it, with ten minutes to spare, from Heathrow to the Reading railway station for the train to Aberystwyth, changing at Birmingham New Street.

Now earlier I suggested that British Rail is alive and well and without a doubt the best mode of transport for journeys such as this. Quiet electric trains, not the melodious huffing, chuffing and puffing steam trains I spotted in yesteryear. Green fields with corn, cows and sheep, and a few horses here and there. Little villages with redbrick houses and the occasional grey stone in the older places. Rolling hillsides. Colorful washing on clothes lines. Many cars parked all around the houses and along the village streets. And more cars, until we hit countryside again with tall hedges, elderflowers, cows, corn and sheep, and occasional horses. We also passed a pig farm, which reminded me of the time, during WWII in Mill House, Sproatley (the center of the universe) where we kept pigs, chickens, ducks, geese and rabbits, and grew potatoes, onions, cabbages, peas, beans, carrots, gooseberries, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, roses, pears, apples, and damsons. In 1947 we changed our earth toilet to a water flush thing and got piped water to the house. Our earth toilet was a two seater next to a lavender tree, accessed through the washouse. We heated the bath water in a coal fired boiler, only big enough for one bath, guess who got second turn on Saturday nights! Every small town we passed on the train had a collection of allotments, with tool sheds for refreshments, and enough vegetables and flowers for the family and friends. This alternation went on for the duration of the trip, punctuated occasionally by hills that were quite big and old but not exactly like the Rockies. Many sheep. A truly pleasant train ride, you should try it sometime. Thank you British Rail.

These runaround trips are very convenient. We paid $808 for two people to travel any distance on eight days within a month. In the end we managed to use up seven days with the last day being on the underground from Lewisham to Heathrow. The diligent analysts among you should plot the itinerary and divide $404 by the measured straight-line distance to find an estimate of dollars per mile. British Rail is great if you like fields with horses, cows, sheep and corn, punctuated by villages with red brick houses, washing lines, pubs and grey stone houses from yesteryear. Not to mention the elderflowers in full bloom, hedgerows and rolling hills and huts and allotments next to the villages. The landscape was also punctuated with rolling hills, small streams and canals; surely the best way to travel, if you wish to avoid the crowded roads. Blue skies and hot sun in England’s green and pleasant land with still enough room for feet to walk upon in modern time. I never understood what this had to do with Jerusalem; please advise. This was a great beginning of “the trip of a lifetime”, marred only by some inconsiderate person being ill and requiring an ambulance before we set off on the first train leg. “Medical personnel are aboard, we are sorry for the inconvenience.” This inconvenience allowed us to miss our first connection in Birmingham after stops in Banbury and Leamington Spa, the site of happy cricket memories (I got a fifty against Leamington I recall). But as we had taken a short cut by bus to Reading, the later connection got us on the train that we had originally planned for.

Then came an interesting conversation. After a few stops the train arrived in Shrewsbury. A man across the isle asked: “is this the Birmingham train?” I said, “no it’s going to Aberystwyth, we just came from Birmingham.” Another passenger politely corrected me with - “no this is the Birmingham train, the Aberystwyth train is on the other side of the platform.” We made the transition, luggage in hand, with seconds to spare. The ticket collector came along the center aisle to check us out, as many stations now don’t use turnstiles. I told her about our near miss and she explained that “we had to change the train because of a problem with the electronic signaling system.” Perhaps it was our degenerated hearing, coupled with the strange English accent, that prevented us catching the earlier announcement over the tannoy. Why can’t the English speak like me? On our new train, a nice man with a trolley sold us cups of tea and came along later to refill our tea cups with hot water, at no extra charge. The red brick was now punctuated with isolated farm houses and Tudor houses in little villages with the now familiar accouterments. Then came higher hills and fields full of sheep. “*What is this life, if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare at sheep and cows?*” or was that the Lake District? Wordsworth? Longfellow? Miss Mair, our fierce English teacher or Mr. Naylor, our ancient Geography teacher, would have rapped my knuckles for this error. Once again we had a fright. At Machynlleth, the sign in the carriage read “to Birmingham International”. Naturally, given our recent experience, we were somewhat perturbed. So like diligent tourists we politely asked around and were told “don’t worry, they often forget to change these notices.” Soon we saw a big inlet, we were getting close to Aberystwyth station with smiling faces to greet us and a short walk to our first stop.

We met Ken and Eurwen Booth while we were at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia; Ken was doing a sabbatical there on International Relations. Some 30 odd years later he is a distinguished professor at Aberystwyth University explaining why the (political and social) world is what it is and how it got here, through the media of many publications and umpteen books. He gave me a short beginner’s guide to the subject, which has recently been demonstrated by Israel’s statement regarding a Jewish nation state, albeit with acceptance of a multicultural population. One theory is that “what goes around comes around” or will the melting pot prevail? I am reminded of a group of friends from Loughborough, during rag week, setting up a customs and immigration post on the Welsh border. Meanwhile Eurwen, who has retained her Welsh accent in contrast to Ken’s Yorkshire one, adamantly seeks to change the world into a more equitable culture, particularly regarding women’s rights. She even chains herself to the railings (not literally) with fellow activists to make her point, perhaps reminiscent of the South Wales coal miners’ demonstrations whose lifelong jobs became obsolete with changes in energy technology. Coal mining is a dangerous business, the South Wales disaster reminded us of the perils of working underground. I grew up with coal fires in a house with no plumbing and electricity. Our coalman was my schoolfriend Dave’s dad. Coal delivery was also a hard job - the truck was piled high with 10 stone bags of lumpy coal; the driver and his mate got out at every house and carried a bag or two across the road, verge and footpath to be dumped through the coal house door, otherwise known as the “coal ‘ole” - a three foot by three foot hole in the wall some five feet from the ground. Coalmen have black clothes, hands, faces and lungs.

We were treated to good food and a movie at the University cultural center and, on the second day, a tour of the town and its surrounds. Now one would expect that inhabitants of thirty years or so would know their way around the paths on the local hill sides but that would be an unreasonable assumption. We had a beautiful walk around the hills, near a golf course I recall, until we got lost and had to retrace our tracks. Eventually all was well and we got to see the beautiful view over the town and Cardigan Bay, twice! Plus good exercise for Eileen’s knee. We also visited the National Museum and Art Gallery, Aberystwyth’s prize national edifice, which contains the works of many famous artists. I like museums, they have stuff older than me, I was never any good at art.

We took the train from Aberystwyth to Selly Oak, with a quick platform change at Birmingham New Street. Eileen and I first moved to Selly Oak after our wedding in 1968. We used to walk down Bristol Road, hand in hand, to Birmingham University where we completed our PhDs, Eileen in health care operations studies and Brian in the causes and forms of spatial and operational memory failures in every day life and work. Perhaps I should have (as I now am) looked at aging as a causal factor, but back then I looked at temporal decay and informational interference. Try this one at home - blindfolded or eyes closed, draw a series of three, four, five and six sided figures with the object of finishing the shape where you started; draw with pauses between strokes of one, two or three seconds. Mix up the sequences or, if you really wish, design some kind of factorial experiment. Next extrapolate generously to explain why your spatial memory is the cause of getting lost in unfamiliar places. Repeat with number and word lists. During that six years in Birmingham we made a lot of friends, many through football and cricket clubs as well as work and neighbors. One couple in particular - Roy and Kathy Low - invited us to stay and show us the town.

The talk was mostly about football, gardens, children, travels and politics, with references to yester year, when we were young and fit. Roy and I played Sunday morning league football for King’s Norton I believe or was that rugby? Cricket had Roy at Weoley Hill while I played for Harborne, which had, and still has a short boundary. I was reminded of one occasion in an evening match between the two clubs that local knowledge (of the short boundaries) prevailed as the Weoley Hill bowlers kept over pitching outside off or bowling too short on a good wicket. My considerable success with the bat on that occasion was rewarded first by the opportunity to buy pints all round and later by an off season transfer to Weoley Hill, where I did not live up to my inflated reputation. The following season I transferred to Hong Kong University, where again we had a short boundary next to a wooded ravine which led down to Kennedy town; lots of lost balls. Roy and Kathy have a kitchen window that looks down their beautiful garden. This garden, like many suburban gardens all over the world, is long and narrow, sufficient for a cricket pitch with a reasonably long run up for the bowler; straight drives will hit the kitchen window or, at the other end, go over the wall into the park, anything to the on or off will either irritate the neighbors or damage the flowers in their wavy beds. English gardens are nice, especially those with greenhouses.

On the second evening Roy had arranged a dinner at a Turkish place downtown and invited old college friends David and Liz Dedicoat, who live on the other side of town. David played cricket with me at Loughborough and recruited me for a season to play for Knowle and Dorridge, but the drive was too long from Selly Oak, especially after celebrating wins, or losses, in the bar. We recalled our attendance at each other’s weddings back in 1968. Happy days. It’s funny that none of our personalities or appearances seem to have changed much over the 50 years. Perhaps minor changes in shape. Inevitably the conversation moved back to family, friends, football and cricket. Do you remember when………..? Whatever happened to……? We’re still in touch with……..! Our Loughborough University cricket team won the prestigious Charity Shield with resounding wins over the very good local town and country teams. David inherited the reins of the family business - manufacturing brass gas fittings, but a takeover by a company that were more interested in brass than brass, allowed David and Liz to retire comfortably to their homes in Solihull and West Wales.

Roy dropped us off again at the Selly Oak railway station. Eileen and I had walked under that bridge daily for six years without ever thinking about the convenient railway station above. Birmingham to York was both scenic and fast and the connection to Malton even faster, and scenicer. Niece Mary and husband Steve collected us from Malton station on Friday 22nd after we had been to Leeds twice - wrong train from York! Oops again. A short drive through rolling hills to Thornton le Dale, tea and cake in the garden and then a walk around the village. Now this village is right out of the town and country glossy magazines - stone houses and shops along mainstreet, surrounded by well-manicured stone

suburbs sporting all the right floral arrangements.

The next day Mary drove us to Sproatley to meet Mandy, Sue and her son Alex on the village green. Mandy is the daughter of cousin Joan, and Sue is cousin John Worsnop’s daughter, I think, which makes Mandy and Sue my first cousins once removed. We looked at Mill House, still there from 1826. On the village green I checked the hand and footholds on the horse chestnut tree I used to climb, some to the easy “monkey slide” and others to the precarious top. We walked around the village reminiscing about farms, school, church, chapel, pubs (top and bottom), police station, grocer’s shop, baker’s shop, butcher’s shop, hardware shop, plumbers, fish and chip shop, carpenter and undertaker’s shed, village institute, war memorial, tradesman’s row and cockpit row (yes they still did cock fighting back in the day) not to mention the old families. Population 193, then, almost 2000 now.

We made a quick detour to Burton Constable Hall for lunch in the cafe, waiting for cousin Kath and Julie to arrive. Unfortunately Kathleen was sick so we weren’t able to catch up with that branch (my dad’s sister Nellie) of the family. Burton Constable hall was first built back in the 12th century with various renovations every few hundred years. Every year we paid our rent to the lord of the manor, Chichester Constable. One year the annual rent increased from 3 to 12 pounds!!

The next stop was Malet Lambert School for a quick photo and a nostalgic walk into East Park.  Mandy then made us all welcome at her parent’s house - my cousin Joan and husband Alan returned from holidays in Scotland later that day. Both Joan and Alan looked very well after about 65 years of marriage Joan was slim and friendly, Alan as always, the joker. The house was full of brass ornaments - all I have is a couple of brass elephants, and some wooden ones.

We stayed overnight at the Royal Hotel (Queen Victoria also stayed there I believe) adjacent to Paragon Station in Hull. In the morning after a fine British breakfast, we caught the trans Pennine train to Blackpool, with only minor disruptions and major scenery. Eileen grew up in Fleetwood where her parents owned a seaside cafe and boarding house, the Balmoral, and she and her sister, Kathleen, waited tables and cleaned rooms; good training for a future wife and Business School dean. Back in the day, both Fleetwood and Hull were thriving fishing ports with trawlers that dashed around Iceland and back to bring cod to eat with our chips. Most of the cod was caught close to Iceland who instituted a twelve mile fishing limit which caused a major barrier for the few hundred Hull trawlers. Also freezer trawlers were developed that could hang around the North Atlantic for weeks and bring their catch back to any willing port with a good rail service. So Hull and Fleetwood had to diversify; Fleetwood always had a thriving tourist business along with their more glossy neighbors, Blackpool. Hull struggled for a while except for the world famous Reckitt and Coleman, makers of household products and the also famous Brough airplane manufacturing - the vertical takeoff Harrier.

Brian was fortunate to pass the “11 plus” exam and get selected for Malet Lambert High School, the adolescent’s link to A Levels and college. Mally is a small walk across East Park from the bus stop on Holderness road, next to a fish and chip shop, a barber, a newsagent and the East Park Baptist Church. Eileen had to wait a little longer as her convent school was not renowned for technical subjects which she pursued via a long daily bus ride to a technical college in Preston. Luckily, again, Brian was able to survive Grammar School, the Royal Air Force, Physiotherapy School and Hope Street secondary school in Birmingham before colliding with Eileen at Loughborough in 1964. And the rest is History as they say. Our golden wedding is at the end of September.

Our trip of a lifetime took us from Fleetwood to Loughborough to be met by Roy Jones, now an emeritus professor of Sports Technology at Loughborough University. He designs golf clubs and similar hitting instruments, but cannot do much for my, or his, swing. Roy and Irene now live in the idyllic town of Barrow on Soar. The conversation inevitably focussed on football, non stop. Now Roy was and still is a staunch Liverpool supporter, but surprisingly copied the playing style of Nobby Stiles, the famous Manchester United midfielder during our era. This style may have been due to visual or cognitive myopia - “kick owt above grass that moves”. Like Nobby, Roy ruled the midfield. He also played rugby at fly half (when Mick Fenlon was not available) for Telford hall and still won’t admit that he met his match when playing opposite yours truly against Royce hall. We did the river walk and a tour of a local stately home and gardens. The Turkish place and food for dinner were both decorate and delicious. What is it with English food? I suggest that the only difference is the difference - a nominal rather than ordinal matter. Perhaps too much familiarity, except for fish and chips and roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and bread and treacle.

Lorna, another old high school friend and her husband picked us up from Loughborough to drive us down to see David Carmichael in Cambridge. Lorna got into management early on, she was head girl and then became a school teacher where crowd control is the order of the day. She and her husband also got into local politics, where, they assured us politics are really political. David Carmichael, my high school buddy, now lives in Cambridge after a long career in chemical engineering consulting after Leeds University. His main claim to fame is golf - +3 handicap in his hey day, and an England cap (if that’s what they do in international golf.) This chemical success was achieved despite the teaching of the infamous Mr Frow, our Chemistry master at Malet Lambert. Very few of us passed our “O” level chemistry, perhaps because Mr Frow , Percy when he wasn’t listening, frowned upon our surreptitious attempts at mixing things just to see what happened. I recall that we invented some novel colors and smells. We had similar, nonstandard adventures with earthworms, frogs and rats in the zoology laboratory with Miss Crackles, fondly known as Bombsite Bertha due to her weekend pastime exploring those rich botanical landscapes from the second world war. This group (the class of ’56) grew up during that war, my family evacuated to Sproatley to dodge the bombs. Many of us had friends and relatives that were not so lucky. David still sees a lot of another high school friend Sue (nee) Skinner, the daughter of the school master in Preston, the village next to Sproatley. Sue lives in California, so we didn’t catch up on this occasion, but David has suggested a get together in Florida, sort of half way in between in the fall.

We visited niece Jenny and daughter Felicity in Lewisham with colorful tours around the market. The English like to stand in ordered lines for everything, passing the time of day with their fellow queuers. In this case there were cherries, tomatoes, blueberries, peas and grapes as well as the usual apples, pears and oranges. Food is nice, especially when it grows on trees and comes fresh to market. Eileen also recalls brisket, poached eggs and spaghetti bolognese. One evening we went for a lovely walk up to Hilly Fields park where we enjoyed the tail end of a  hot summer’s day and watched a local cricket match. Cricket is a funny game, so different when seen in the park or on the tele. The shorter formats (now down to 100 ball innings) are different, but much more like the games played in the fields, parks and playgrounds around the country and commonwealth. Felicity and I each had a ice cream with TWO chocolate flakes! We enjoyed a quick visit by Jenny’s big sister Julie before going to LHR for our return to the US, having left standing invitations for return visits to all the old (sic) friends and family.

A very welcome surprise was Jenny getting us Center Court tickets to Wimbledon where she works in the Royal Box with the dignitaries. There were only minor dignitaries on the day of our visit, no kings, queens, princes or princesses. But the seats were excellent and we got to see top players like Roger Federer and Serena Williams in the early rounds. Thank you Jenny.

Another detour from Jenny’s house was with old school mate Barry Wigg and his wife, Babs. Barry had a career first in Phys Ed teaching and then as an inspector of schools. Now that’s an interesting one, a bit like Eileen’s job as inspector of Business schools. Both have rules, which are often broken, or more correctly “laws” which are meant to be interpreted. We visited the local stately home, near Barry’s home in Swanley, worked on our calorie intake to guarantee that we would return to the USA with more than we came with. We swapped stories of Malet Lambert as we strolled around the local stately homes. Finally Barry took us back to Jenny’s in nearby Lewisham, where Felicity bubbled.

The final leg was from Lewisham to Didcot, via Reading; fast again with minimal routing surprises. Big brother Doug, the famous skydiver, was waiting for the short drive to Godwyn Close, Abingdon, their home for many years with another immaculate long thin garden, but with a wall to protect them from the local school yard activities. Sister in law Helen is a stickler for tidy gardens, houses and meals, and enjoys her cup of tea and chat around the kitchen table, where we discussed the comings and goings of nieces Mary and Heidi, their children and our brood. Mary we had met up north in Yorkshire, where she lives the good country life. I believe that she is even a member of the local WI. Heidi and family moved to France many years ago to teach those World Cup winners how to speak English. Her son Joe is a superstar (very) long distance runner, now copied by mother Heidi. I always say that it must be in the genes, but my short legs confound this explanation of these ancestral aptitudes.

We had a picturesque trip around Oxford town to ooh and ahh at the beautiful halls and academic buildings and the river with its long rowing boats preparing for the annual derby with Cambridge. The town bustles with bikes and pedestrians. We visited the famous Blackwells book shop, to check if they still had that also famous Statistical Distributions book, no luck this time, perhaps you should try Amazon.They do make a nice cup of tea however. Doug dropped us off again at Didcot for the short train ride, via Reading, to Heathrow

On the Saturday after our return I scaled the infamous Dutton Hill to test my resolve regarding the upcoming Michigan Senior Olympics. Despite the middling training efforts during the trip of a lifetime, I beat the hill again, in one hour and a few minutes, a far cry from some forty odd minutes a couple of decades ago. My few runs during the trip of a lifetime included the familiar Lodge Hill and Weoley Park roads with a loop around Wellman Croft, the location of our first home in Selly Oak, Birmingham. Fleetwood offered the promenade and estuary and Barrow on Soar the River Soar lined with houseboats, reminiscent of Toad of Toad hall. Thornton offered the High Street, picturesque, timeless small town Yorkshire; someone should write a book about the inhabitants and trades of High Street, perhaps they already did. Finally Abingdon offered the towpath on the Thames.The training and clear English air must have paid off - four golds medals in the MSO.

Now this is still a work in progress. Reminders, corrections, comments and suggestions may or may not be welcome.

**Chapter 47**

**Trees**

When I was little, we had a lilac tree next to our outside earth toilet. Lilac smells nice. Moving out and away from our house we had a pear tree, which was actually attached to our house. Its branches came very close to my bedroom window and, in a good year I could chud (back in the day chudding meant sneaking into orchards to steal fruit) about a dozen pears without falling out of the window. Next to the house was a large rose arch, but that really isn’t a tree. A short walk down the orchard path (the garden path went straight down the garden, parallel to Park Road, to the garden gate) took us to the orchard. First, on the right next to the pig sty, there stood a large damson tree. Sometimes ripe damsons fell into the pig run and the pig usually beat us to this delicacy. But there were plenty more to be had for the family. Next came a bunch of apple trees and gooseberry bushes. Along the road, in the middle of the village green, there stood a large horse chestnut tree. Two rows of chestnut trees boarded church lane on the way up the hill to the famous Sproatley Endowed School. On either side of Park Road there are woods and further down at the fork stand two large beech tees. Across 15 acre are the remnants of Sourlands which was decimated as part of the war effort. We used to pick delicious brambles there on Sunday mornings.

Moving forward some 75 years we bought a house on Amelia Island. The Plantation is full of big old pin oaks which create a canopy from which hang fuzzy stuff like candy floss. A great big branch grows horizontally along our deck and another one leans on our roof.

I remember playing cricket for Quinton (I was captain that year) against Rugeley, the ground has a large tree where deep mid off or long leg should stand. If you hit the tree you get an automatic four. On one side of the ground there is a large grassy hill side where spectators in their cars have picnics while watching the game. On one occasion I was batting with a guest county player (John Jameson) and we found ourselves way behind the clock, so we played for a draw, much to the consternation of the spectators who registered their condemnation by serenading us with their car horns. We settled our differences and secured the following year’s fixture in the bar after the game.

Both Hong Kong and Singapore had tropical trees, but not really noteworthy.

Halifax Nova Scotia had many trees, I walked past majestic rows on my way to Dalhousie every day. We had a big tree in our back yard, but our neighbor complained that it might fall on his twins, so we cut it down.

Our house in Michigan – down Hunters Creek Lane stands on 12 acres, it used to be 15 acres but we sold three so we could build an extension. The lot has a river running through it and a path to the golf course, and a lot of trees; they are pretty nondescript, but collectively they form nice woods and are resting places for the result of slices on the sixth hole. I’ve collected many of these priceless white nuggets and a few yellow ones, plus one pink one.

**Chapter 48**

**Visitors**

Back in the day on Sundays we lived in a village called Sproatley. It boasted a very old Anglican church, a Methodist chapel, a top of the hill pub and a bottom pub, a bakers shop, a grocery store, which doubled up as a post office and a butchers shop. There was also a village school, a police station, a village institute, a plumbers and a bunch of farms and cottages. Whereas the church had a vicar and a vicarage, the chapel relied on lay preachers who rode the bus or their bicycles from the town to preach on Sunday evenings. They often came for Sunday tea before the evening service. I learned that I had to watch my p’s and q’s, keep my elbows off the table and sit quietly until the others had finished their meal. Some of these visitors would talk to me but, because they were grown-ups, they usually had more important things to say to my parents. We had other visitors from the East Park Baptist Park Ladies Bright Hour on Mondays for tea. Again this was a gentile affair with little fingers raised as they supped their tea and ate their cucumber sandwiches.

As we speak we have two lots of visitors. First Georgina and her family drove in two cars from Atlanta. We also have staying with us Eileen’s sister, Kathleen, her daughter, Jenny and her daughter Felicity. Jenny is important, she wears her Navy uniform and guards Buckingham Palace and the Royal Box at Wimbledon. When Jenny was sixteen she stayed with us in Oklahoma to look after the children while Eileen worked on her master’s.

As we have lived in exotic places around the world we have had lots of visitors. In Hong Kong we had niece Mary for a while. In Nova Scotia, most of the visitors were neighbors and work colleagues. In Michigan we have lots of deer and turkeys visit out back yard to eat the potted plants.

We don’t like some visitors here in Florida. We have spiders, and cockroaches and ants and hornets and a strange animal that burrows under the corner of our house. We engage terminators and exterminators to rid ourselves of these unwelcome guests, with mixed success.

**Chapter 49**

**Waiting**

I’m sure I started waiting at a very young age but I didn’t think much about it until I started using the bus into town, which ran every hour or so. The trick was to get up at eight, splash your face, get dressed, eat your breakfast, finish your homework, grab your school satchel and run out of the house at 8.24. The walk to the bus stop took 3 minutes if you ran, alternatively the run to the bus stop took 5 minutes if you walked. A quick glance up the hill told you that all was well and that you had a two minute wait by the petrol pumps for the bus to arrive. Now this process of waiting has been observed by mathematicians and operations researchers; in fact I used to teach queuing theory and discrete event simulation – it was fun constructing table top models with dice and chips, before using a computer to hammer out the details.

A frustrating part of working with computers is waiting for a response from that dumb (some would say pseudo intelligent) machine. Long, long ago in an office far away I was tasked with improving the productivity and mood of rows of women who were hunched over “fast random enquiry machines” – the forefathers of contemporary computers. The mandate of this office was to manage the transactions between customers and health care providers for the State of Oklahoma. Anyway, because these fast random enquiry machines were not very fast, the operators pushed the return (enter) button and then sat, drumming their fingers on the desk top, for about half an hour while something happened. Woe betide the careless operator who pushed a wrong button, they had to go through this finger tapping all over again. Nowadays, we get frustrated with delays as long as a few microseconds while some website finds the answers to the world’s important questions and then downloads them in glorious technicolor.

Waiting in checkout lines is another familiar problem. The supermarkets put candy to tempt the idle queuer. Many years ago at Disneyland there were goofy animals to entertain the kiddywinks waiting (for half an hour) their turn for a two minute ride. Both Disneyland and supermarket managers have to deal with long queues by adding more service channels, but that costs money. So we have FIFO and LIFO and beware of queue jumpers and renegers.

Waiting also happens in games. Think of the batsman in cricket waiting for the bowler to walk back to the end of his 20 yard run, then gallop back with a fierce face and waving arms to release a projectile at your head. Meanwhile you have seen this scene before, so you put your back foot across the stumps and position your body and bat for a pull or hook, only to find out too late that the sneaky bowler had pitched the ball in your blockhole. Owzat!!! There’s even more waiting in football. If a game lasts 90 minutes , less the twenty minutes or so the ball goes out of play and there are 22 players on the fields, then an individual player, on average, has the ball for less than 5 minutes. Golf is another matter. If a round takes 3 hours and you hit the ball 100 times at 5 seconds a hit then you only play for about 10 minutes. No wonder a famous commentator (I forget his name) once described golf as a good walk spoiled.

Now some sceptics among my readers will ask “Ah, but what about thinking time?” Now many years ago in a laboratory far, far away (Eindhoven) I researched the problem of psychological refractoriness. I flashed lights and sounds at the unsuspecting subjects and had them press a button; on occasion I warned them just before the stimulus came. I observed that the brighter or louder the stimulus signal was, the longer was the response time. I also had subjects recall letter and number groups of different sizes and played with the response requirement. Lo and behold, the more stuff they had to do, the longer it took them to do it. Sometimes I sits and thinks and sometimes I just sits.

The interested reader, while he or she is waiting for his or her dinner, may ponder the many other waiting situations and waiting games, that we experience every day. Others may just tap their fingers and salivate.